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# THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

*A History of the  
First Marxist Party in the Americas*

by

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## PREFACE

This is the story of the first Marxist political organization in North America, the Workingmen's Party of the United States (WPUS).<sup>1</sup> It lasted only a little over one year—from July, 1876, to December, 1877—but in the course of its brief existence, it made several important contributions. It recruited, publicized, and nominated for office the first Black socialist in U.S. history. It played an important role in several key areas during the "Great Labor Uprising of 1877," the tremendous revolt of workers that was triggered by the railroad strike in July of that year and the first nationwide strike in United States history. It also made a major contribution to the founding and formation of the modern U.S. labor movement.

When it came into existence, *The Socialist*, published in New York City, greeted its birth with the toast: "Success and long life to the Workingmen's Party of the United States." Although in a formal sense, the WPUS did not enjoy a long life, in reality it has had the longest life of any radical party in the United States. In 1877, its name was changed to the Socialistic Labor Party, which is still in existence today as the Socialist Labor Party. That organization split, and out of the split the Socialist Party of America emerged in 1901. That party, in turn, split in 1919, and out of that split emerged the present-day Communist Party of the United States. Thus, despite its brief formal existence, the Workingmen's Party of the United States was the first link in a chain that has continued to the present day.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the following institutions and their staffs: Tamiment Institute Library, New York University; Columbia University Library; State Historical Society of Wisconsin; University of Wisconsin Library; Library of the Institute for Marxism-Leninism, Berlin, German Democratic Republic; Library of the University of California, Los Angeles; Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Haverford College Library; Lincoln University Pennsylvania Library; University of Cincinnati Library; Library of the Cincinnati Historical Society; Library of Congress, National Archives; University of Kentucky Library; Missouri Historical



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# 1

## PROLOGUE

The contributions made by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels to the labor movement of their day were many and far-reaching.<sup>1</sup> In both Europe and the United States in the last century, their followers were among the founders and first defenders of the trade unions, and their ideas helped shape the modern labor movement almost from its inception.<sup>2</sup> Although it was not until the post-Civil War decade that Marxist influence began to be directly linked with a broad trade-union movement in the United States, even during the decade before the Civil War, Marxist thought had begun to penetrate the country and to influence the early socialist movement here. From 1852 to 1861, Marx was the European correspondent of the New York *Daily Tribune*. Published by Horace Greeley and edited by Charles A. Dana, it was one of the most influential newspapers in the United States. Marx contributed almost five hundred articles to the *Tribune* during his association with the paper.<sup>3</sup>

The pioneer Marxist in the United States was Joseph Weydemeyer, a close friend of Marx and Engels who migrated to the country at the end of 1851. Through both his newspapers, *Die Revolution* and *Die Reform*, and the organizations, *Proletariabund* and the American Labor Union, he laid the foundations of Marxism in the United States. The American Labor Union, initiated in 1853 by five German immigrants headed by Weydemeyer, was a pioneer Marxist effort to build a labor federation that would unite native- and foreign-born and skilled and unskilled workers—an organization combining working-class political and trade-union demands.<sup>4</sup> As David Herreshoff has pointed out, the American Labor Union was “a quasi-party, quasi-trade union organization” with “a program designed to gain access to the non-socialist bulk of the working class by employing issues of immediate relevance to the United States, without losing sight of the socialist goal.”<sup>5</sup>

Although both the *Proletariabund* and the American Labor Union passed out of existence within three years, labor radicalism in the



German community in the United States continued to develop, reflected by the formation of the Communist Club of New York on October 25, 1857. The club was not only the first Marxist organization in the Western Hemisphere, but also the only socialist (and labor) organization that invited Blacks to join as equal members. Its constitution required all members to "recognize the complete equality of all persons—no matter of whatever color or sex."<sup>6</sup> The club corresponded with Marx and tried to stimulate the establishment in this country of a broad labor association to cooperate with similar movements in Europe. Joseph Weydemeyer, who at that time was living in Milwaukee, hailed the formation of the first Marxist organization in the hemisphere and helped it to broaden its contacts. By 1858, there were Communist Clubs in New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati.<sup>7</sup>

The Communist Clubs were in the forefront of the struggle against slavery, and their members played an important role in mobilizing the German-American workers in opposition to the "peculiar institution."<sup>8</sup> When the Civil War began with the attack on Fort Sumter, most of the German radical organizations disbanded because the majority of their members had enlisted in the Union forces. The New York Communist Club did not meet for the duration of the war since most of its members had joined the Union Army. Several socialist leaders attained positions of high rank. Joseph Weydemeyer was commissioned a colonel and assigned by Lincoln to command the military district of St. Louis. August Willich, the former Prussian officer and friend of Karl Marx, took part in a number of engagements; he was severely wounded and left the army with the rank of brigadier general. Robert Rosa, who had been a Prussian officer before he became a member of the Communist Club, was a major in the Forty-Fifth Regiment of New York. Fritz Jacobi, vice-president of the Communist Club of New York, enlisted as a private and was a lieutenant when he died on the field of Fredericksburg.<sup>9</sup>

By the time the Civil War was over, the Marxist movement in the United States had all but disappeared. Several leading Marxists had died during the war, while others had drifted into other organizations. Weydemeyer survived the war but died in 1866. This decline, however, was only temporary. For one thing, immediately following the war, the Marxists gained two recruits who were to play leading roles in rebuilding Marxist influence—Adolph Douai<sup>10</sup> and Friedrich A. Sorge.<sup>11</sup> Both had become refugees after the failure of the German Revolution of 1848 and both had moved simultaneously into the Marxist movement. Douai publicly announced his conversion to Marxism in 1868 after reading the first volume of Marx's *Das Kapital*, published in German in 1867. Nine years later, Douai began a series of articles on

*Das Kapital* in *The Socialist*, which announced that this was the first attempt to render Marx's classic work into English in a concise and popular form.<sup>12</sup>

Sorge at first studied the ideas of Ferdinand Lassalle, whose followers were exercising considerable influence in the German-American community. However, he decided that Lassalle's theories were based on false principles. He rejected the thesis of the "iron law of wages," which held that the amount paid to a worker was equal to what was "necessary for his subsistence" and would never be any higher. He also rejected the view that trade unions and strikes were of no importance and that the ballot was the only instrument for lifting "the yoke of capital" from labor, since it alone could enable the workers to establish producers' cooperatives with state aid and thereby raise themselves out of wage slavery into socialism. Convinced that these ideas appealed more to handicraftsmen than to factory workers, Sorge concluded that Lassalleism had no future in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Logically and inevitably, Sorge turned to Marxism and began to promote its ideas in the New York-based German Labor Association. Later, he described the results of these efforts:

The members, almost exclusively plain wage-workers of every possible trade, vied with each other in the study of the most difficult economic and political problems. Among the hundreds of members who belonged to the society from 1869 to 1874, there was hardly one who had not read his Marx (*Capital*), and more than a dozen of them had mastered the most involved passages and definitions and were armed against any attacks of the capitalist, middle-class, radical or reform schools.<sup>14</sup>

The group did not exist merely to conduct study circles but also used Marxist principles in developing political perspectives for working-class action. Samuel Gompers, one of the founders and the long-time president and guiding spirit of the American Federation of Labor, later recalled that he and many of the other founders of the Federation were influenced by these Marxist groups and by the writings of Marx and Engels, which they were able to read as a result of their association with the groups. Gompers recalls, for example, how a translation of the *Communist Manifesto* aroused him "to master the German language" in order that he might read for himself the works of Marx and Engels.<sup>15</sup>

In June, 1867, Sorge sent the first of many letters to Marx, informing him of his desire to set up a section of the International Workingmen's Association in Hoboken, New Jersey, near New York City, where he lived. Marx, who (like Engels) never fully trusted



Adolph Douai's grasp of Marxism because of the influence of the "currency nonsense" on his social philosophy,<sup>16</sup> developed great respect for Sorge and encouraged him to proceed. Thus began a correspondence that was to continue regularly until Marx's death in 1883.<sup>17</sup>

The International Workingmen's Association—the First International—was launched on September 28, 1864, when more than two thousand workers crowded into St. Martin's Hall in London to attend a meeting sponsored by British and French labor organizations. It quickly became the focal point for the European working-class movement, and in less than a decade, it also established itself in the United States. Its aim, wrote Marx, was "to make the workmen of different countries not only *feel* but *act* as brethren and comrades in the army of emancipation."<sup>18</sup>

Marx and Engels were active in the organization from its inception, although apparently neither had anything to do with the preparations that brought it into being. As Saul K. Padover points out, however, without Marx, "it is questionable whether the organization would have survived or would have had any meaning."<sup>19</sup> It was Marx, for example, who wrote the *Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen's Association*, and he also wrote virtually all of the public statements and major reports of the General Council, of which he was a leading figure. So much importance did Marx attach to the International that his involvement with it caused a delay in the original publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital*.<sup>20</sup>

It was to the General Council of the IWA that Marx delivered his famous speech on "Wages, Price and Profit," which set forth his theoretical justification of trade unionism and the struggle for such immediate demands as higher wages. The occasion of the speech was a debate with a follower of Robert Owen, the utopian socialist, who had argued that every wage increase nullifies itself by producing a price increase. Marx also included in his speech a careful explanation of his view of the inherent inability of the trade unions, by themselves, to achieve the socialist goal. However, he made clear his position that the struggle for immediate demands was an essential preliminary to the achievement of socialism.<sup>21</sup>

All radicals in the United States were moved by Marx's appeal in the *Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen's Association*: "To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes. They seem to have comprehended this, for in England, Germany, Italy, and France there have taken place simultaneous revivals, and simultaneous efforts are being made at the political reorganization of the working men's party."<sup>22</sup> It was this

stimulus that led in January, 1868, to the formation of the Social Party of New York, organized as a result of the short-lived merger of the Communist Club and the General German Workingmen's Association, which had been founded in 1866 by the followers of Lassalle. After the party made an insignificant showing in the election of 1868, it was reorganized in December, 1869, as Section 1 of the International Workingmen's Association in the United States. Its secretary and moving spirit, and the leading force in the U.S. sections of the International from their inception, was Friedrich A. Sorge. In July, 1868, the IWA General Council had empowered Sorge to act in its name in the United States. When the German, French, and Czech sections in New York City organized the central committee of the International Workingmen's Association of North America in December, 1870, Sorge became its corresponding secretary.<sup>23</sup> It was in this capacity that he informed the General Council of developments in the United States, including those in the National Labor Union.

The outbreak of the Civil War had extinguished most of the trade unions that had flourished during the 1850s. However, the deterioration of living conditions during the closing years of the war spurred a revival of trade unionism and brought an increase in the number of both local and national unions. While the real center of organizational activity was the city trades assembly, a movement was launched to unify the labor movement nationally, which led to the convening of the National Labor Council in Baltimore on August 20, 1866. Sixty-four delegates attended and organized the National Labor Union.<sup>24</sup>

Section 1 of the IWA in North America was admitted to the National Labor Union early in 1869 as Labor Union No. 5 of New York, with Friedrich A. Sorge as its delegate. The presence of a delegate from a U.S. section of the First International was hardly surprising. The leading figures in the NLU—men like William H. Sylvius, president of the Iron Moulders' International Union and the outstanding labor leader of the Civil War and post-Civil War era; Richard F. Trevellick, president of the national union of Ship Carpenters and Caulkers; and William J. Jessup, the most prominent figure in the labor organizations of New York, both city and state—were aware of the International Workingmen's Association and understood the need for international labor unity. Sylvius declared again and again that "the interests of labor are identical throughout the world. . . . A victory to them will be a victory to us."<sup>25</sup>

The question of uniting U.S. labor with European labor was brought up at the founding congress of the National Labor Union in 1866. The request to send a delegate to the Geneva Congress of the First International was turned down because there was not enough



time to do so. However, the congress wished them "Godspeed in their glorious work." A year later, at the 1867 congress, affiliation with the International was an important issue. President Jessup moved to affiliate and was supported by Sylvis. Although the congress voted against affiliation, it did decide to send Trevellick to the next congress of the International and pledged cooperation with the organized workingmen of Europe in their struggle against political and social injustice.<sup>26</sup>

Trevellick was unable to collect enough money to make the trip, but two events that took place in the years immediately preceding the admission of Section 1 into the NLU strengthened the possibility of an alliance between that organization and the International Workingmen's Association. In April, 1869, the General Council of the International received a communication from the New York Compositors' Union requesting its help in checking the importation of European strikebreakers. The council voted to aid the union. This action aroused great respect for the International in U.S. trade-union circles.<sup>27</sup> Another display of international solidarity was shown that same year when the dispute over the "Alabama claims"—involving U.S. grievances against Great Britain for assistance to the Confederacy during the Civil War—threatened war between the United States and Great Britain. The address of the General Council, written by Marx and addressed to Sylvis as president of the NLU, said:

Yours is the glorious task of seeing to it that at last the working class shall enter upon the scene of history, no longer as a servile following but as an independent power, as a power imbued with a sense of its responsibility and capable of commanding peace where their would-be masters cry war.

In response, Sylvis said that labor's struggle was a common one throughout the world. In behalf of the working people of the United States, he extended "the right hand of fellowship" to the International and "to all the downtrodden and oppressed sons and daughters of toiling Europe."<sup>28</sup>

Sylvis's untimely death on the eve of the 1869 NLU convention was a bitter blow to international labor unity. Nevertheless, that convention did send a delegate to attend the Basel Congress of the International. That fall, Andrew C. Cameron, editor of the *Workingmen's Advocate* of Chicago and several other cities, and the leading labor paper in the United States, made the trip. A reporter for the *Washington Star* described the scene when Cameron stepped up to IWA Chairman Hermann Jung at the rostrum and amidst a standing ovation, extended "the hand of fellowship of 800,000 workingmen and women on the other side of the Atlantic. . . . It was an imposing

sight to see the elected representatives of labor of the two worlds, holding each other firmly by the hand for some time, and looking at each other as if they were hardly able to believe that it was really so."<sup>29</sup>

At the 1870 NLU convention, Sorge introduced a resolution that stated: "The National Labor Union declares its adherence to the principles of the International Workingmen's Association and expects to join the said association in a short time."<sup>30</sup> The delegates adopted the resolution, but the expectation was never realized.

It was not only the timidity of the NLU leadership after Sylvis's death, but also the organization's general decline that prevented the resolution adopted at the 1870 convention from ever being carried out. Indeed, at the very time that it approved Sorge's resolution pledging early affiliation with the International, the NLU was already on its way to an early demise. Its disintegration was inevitable as it fell increasingly under the domination of nonlabor elements and focused its energies increasingly on currency reform and political action. One after another, the national trade unions pulled away, leaving the organization under the control of the nonlabor elements.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the First International in the United States, under the direction of Friedrich A. Sorge, was making independent progress. Soon after Section 1 was formed in 1867, Sorge received detailed instructions from the IWA headquarters in Geneva on how the cause should be advanced in the United States. "Once you have a secure base in New York," Johann Philipp Becker wrote, "you should attempt to found the same organization in other cities in North America." Each section should have its own statutes in accordance with local conditions, but not conflicting in any way with the General Statutes of the International. Becker then emphasized: "Our sections must maintain the initiative in every matter concerning labor problems; they must be the inspiring, organizing and indoctrinating element."<sup>32</sup>

Sorge and his colleagues in Section 1 worked tirelessly to achieve these objectives. They gave priority to the building and defense of trade unions, the support of the right to strike, the battle for the abolition of contract labor and the tenement house system, and especially to the struggle for the institution of the eight-hour day. As Marxists, they were convinced that the working class, organized in trade unions, would be developing its class consciousness in the day-to-day struggles for these immediate demands and would be taking the necessary initial steps for the transition to the struggle for socialism. Therefore, they attended labor-union meetings, sent delegates to labor conferences, commissioned speakers to attend union conventions during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and influenced a number of



these unions to pass antiwar resolutions. In conjunction with several trade unions, they organized a tremendous mass meeting at Cooper Union to protest the German plan for annexing Alsace-Lorraine and to uphold the right of self-determination. They also helped workers on strike, participated in demonstrations for the eight-hour day, maintained correspondence with miners, shoe workers, machinists, bricklayers, cigar makers, carpenters, and furniture workers, and made a substantial contribution to the formation of national unions in a number of these trades.<sup>33</sup>

The Furniture Workers' Union was organized mainly by the members of the IWA, and the Cigar Makers' Union owed its strength to the activity of the association's members. While the same could be said of several other unions at that time, Gompers singled these two out as "the first constructive" and "efficient" trade unions formed in the United States, providing a model form of organization for the development of the labor movement in that period.<sup>34</sup> The conclusion drawn by Samuel Bernstein in *The First International in America* is that "labor leaders who had passed through the school of the International were the best protagonists of the American trade union movement."<sup>35</sup>

Sorge and the International also constituted the vehicle for the direct dissemination of Marx's ideas in the United States. Sorge, for example, mailed a copy of *Das Kapital* to Ira Seward, the eight-hour champion, who replied that both he and George E. McNeill (his follower and another leading eight-hour advocate) were very much impressed by Marx's work and planned to make others in the movement familiar with it. "I shall quote from the Dr. several passages to help introduce and make his name more familiar to our readers," Seward wrote. "I never knew how much he had said on the Hours of Labor."<sup>36</sup> Of the hundreds of working-class members of the International's Section 1 in New York City, there was "hardly one," Sorge recalled, who had not read *Kapital*.<sup>37</sup>

Between 1869, when Section 1 began to function in New York City, and 1871, 27 sections of the International were organized. Most of them, however, were made up of foreign-born members. Six were native-born, ten German, eight French (exiled victims of the recently crushed Paris Commune), one Czech, and two Irish.<sup>38</sup> The General Council had long been convinced that this was not a desirable situation. Indeed, Marx himself had hinted to Sorge in March, 1871, that an organization composed mainly of foreign sections could be of little influence in the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Sorge's argument was that the workingmen from other countries were not "regarded as *foreigners* or simple residents," but as full citizens of the United States, that they formed "an important and considerable part of this country's trade unions and Labor Societies,"

and that "some of the most powerful and best trade organizations in the U.S. consist almost exclusively of so-called 'foreigners,' viz., the Miners & Laborers Benevolent Association, the Cigarmakers International Union, the Cabinetmakers Societies, the Crispins, etc., etc." Equally important to him was the fact that there were fundamental differences between U.S. and European conditions. The United States, he maintained, lacked a "homogeneous population," and it had to be "judged and decided" according to circumstances "widely differing from those of European countries."<sup>40</sup>

Sorge probably would not have convinced Marx and others on the General Council if he had not advanced the decisive argument that at least the so-called foreigners were workers, with whom it was possible to build the International strictly along class lines. The same could not be said of most of the native-born who joined the English-speaking section and who had no connection with wage labor.

As the prestige of the International mounted, it began attracting all types of middle-class reformers—money and land reformers, language reformers, tax reformers, admirers and imitators of Joseph Proudhon of France, anarchists like Josiah Warren, "Pantarchists" like Stephen Pearl Andrews, free-love advocates like Ezra Heywood and Victoria Woodhull—in short, "reformers of every station and species, of every type and shade."<sup>41</sup> Their presence threatened to turn the International into a conglomeration of advocates of a whole variety of panaceas and utopias. It soon became clear that with such elements taking over its sections, it would be impossible for the International in the United States to "maintain the initiative in every matter concerning labor problems" and become "the inspiring, organizing and indoctrinating element."

Section 12 of New York was made of middle-class reformers and a few trade unionists. It was led by Victoria C. Woodhull of Ohio, who, together with her sister, Tennessee Claflin, espoused the cause of women's rights and social reform in the course of a spectacular career as Wall Street brokers. In 1870, after two years of residence in New York, the sisters succeeded in persuading the aging Cornelius Vanderbilt to finance *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*. The *Weekly* carried the first English translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, defended the Paris Commune and the Communards, advocated women's rights, civil and political rights for Blacks, and a variety of other "advanced ideas," and appealed to reformers of all types. Sorge described it, with obvious distaste, as appealing to a "motley gathering of bourgeois reformers, evangelists of free love, atheists and deists."<sup>42</sup>

It is not necessary here to recount the long and tangled battle that developed between Section 12 and the Marxists and spilled over into the General Council and the Hague Congress of the IWA in 1872.



Suffice it to say that the U.S. Marxists organized a rump meeting of the Central Committee and, with representatives of only eight sections invited, passed a statute requiring that two-thirds of all members of any section of the IWA be wage earners. They then used this regulation to expel Section 12. Both sides in the dispute appealed to the Hague Congress for support and, after a long and heated debate, the expulsion of Section 12 was sustained. Marx and Engels and their disciples in the United States breathed a sigh of relief: the "humbug" had been exposed and eliminated.<sup>43</sup> They had feared that an endorsement of Section 12 would open the door to middle-class reforms that would lead the IWA in the United States down the same path as the defunct National Labor Union.

When he left for the Hague Congress, Sorge was simply a representative of the North American Federation and the corresponding secretary of the U.S. sections. When he returned to the United States, however, he was the general secretary of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, whose headquarters were now to be in New York City.

The transfer of the General Council from London to New York City came about as a result of Marx's fear that it might be taken over by the Blanquists and the anarchists and converted into an instrument for insurrection. Foreseeing the possibility that the followers of Auguste Blanqui and Michael Bakunin might seize the General Council in a conspiratorial "putsch," the Marxists concluded that the body would be safer on the other side of the Atlantic. Although the International in the United States had just split as a result of the conflict over Section 12, the Marxists were confident that the U.S. branch would not only survive but actually move ahead.

If it had, it would probably have been the only one to do so. The Paris Commune of 1871 had fatally damaged the International in Europe. At the time of the Hague Congress, it was outlawed in France and Germany, and elsewhere its members were persecuted. Where it was not underground, it was being weakened by splits with the anarchists. And in England, the British trade unions were avoiding any association with an organization linked in the public mind—however incorrectly—with the responsibility for the Commune.<sup>44</sup>

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the United States seemed to hold out the only hope for the International's survival, and the fact that Sorge would head the General Council strengthened this belief. Marx was deeply impressed by Sorge's leadership qualities. In 1871, he had written of Sorge: "It is my conviction that the General Council must thank him for its effectiveness—a view I have repeatedly stated in the General Council."<sup>45</sup> From the viewpoint of Marx and Engels, he

had just proven himself a stalwart Marxist by his success in preventing reformers, utopian visionaries, and romantics of all kinds from converting the International in the United States into a middle-class instrument for the propagation of every type of panacea, none of which had any connection with scientific socialism.

On its last day, having elected Sorge to serve as general secretary, the Hague Congress elected twelve members of the new General Council and empowered them to increase their number to fifteen. All of them were to reside in the United States. Of them, only Friedrich Bolte, the cigar worker, and Carl Speyer, the cabinetmaker, shared Sorge's Marxist viewpoint and were of any help to him. The others either resigned soon thereafter or became involved in bitter feuds with their fellow council members.<sup>46</sup>

At the time Sorge assumed the office of general secretary, sections of the International existed in at least nine major cities of the United States, with almost 5,000 members. There was a disproportionate number of Germans, but a significant number of other ethnic groups were represented in the North American sections—Irish, French, Bohemian, Scandinavian, and native-born U.S.<sup>47</sup> Despite internal controversies, the North American sections of the IWA were active in trade-union work, and Sorge intended to both continue and intensify that type of activity. From the time he assumed his office, Sorge insisted that the International must become the center for the organization of the working class into trade unions. In the "Instructions to the Delegate of the General Council to the Sixth General Congress" of 1873, Sorge wrote:

The principal duty of the members and sections of the IWA shall be:

(1) To organize the working people of the industrial centers as well as of the agricultural districts into trade unions not only on the narrow basis of obtaining higher wages, but on the broad basis of the complete emancipation of labor, the demand of a normal working day being the first step to it.

(2) To combine those trade unions into central bodies, who, jointly with the F.[ederal] Councils of the respective countries, shall represent the trade unions and sections and conduct the political movement of the workmen of their country, whenever such movements shall be deemed opportune.

Every movement of the combined workmen as a class for the advancement of their own interests of course is a political movement.<sup>48</sup>

In this, Sorge was outlining the basic Marxist approach to the labor movement. In his letters to his followers in the United States, Marx emphasized that the "final object" of the workers' movement was the



"conquest of political power." Such an achievement, however, required "a previous organization of the working class developed up to a certain point, which itself arises from its economic struggles." For this reason, both the "purely economic movement" of the workers (the trade-union efforts to force concessions directly from particular employers through strikes) and the "political movement" (efforts to achieve an eight-hour law) deserved support because both were "a means of developing this organization." But the creation of effective trade unions capable of conducting economic struggles had to precede the achievement of political power by the working class.<sup>49</sup>

In carrying through this Marxist policy, the Marxists on the General Council—Sorge, Friedrich Bolte, Carl Speyer, and a few others—ran into considerable difficulty. In part, this was because the local groups they sought to influence, especially those made up of native-born workers, were either hostile or indifferent to their appeals. To a considerable extent, however, it also stemmed from the fact that they had to contend with the influence of the Lassalleans among both the native- and foreign-born workers. In keeping with the ideas of their teacher, Ferdinand Lassalle, and particularly his "iron law of wages," Lassalle's followers in the United States argued that it was impossible for workers under capitalism to raise their wages above the bare minimum necessary to sustain life, and that the only way to escape from poverty and bondage was for the workers to establish their own cooperative enterprises and use the ballot to obtain state aid for these cooperatives. The Lassalleans entered the trade unions and sought to convert them from organizations that struggled for higher wages, shorter hours, and other improvements in the workers' lives, to associations concentrating on cooperatives and on state aid for these ventures. The Lassalleans viewed the trade unions as unimportant, and their primary purpose was to use them to create a labor party.<sup>50</sup>

Under the leadership of Sorge, who was in constant correspondence with Marx and Engels, the Marxists in the International fought the Lassallean efforts to convert the trade unions into purely political bodies. The Marxists were not opposed to political action, but at least for the time being, they considered it as secondary in importance to the development of labor's organized power through trade unionism. Labor should expend its energies, the Marxists believed, in building trade unions, rather than dissipate its strength in classless political ventures that had no chance of success—no chance, that is, until the workers were organized into trade unions, at which time they would be in a position to combine their economic struggles with independent working-class political action, and to do so effectively.

The Marxists believed that the struggle for socialism must be a step-by-step process which moved from remedying immediate evils

under capitalism to the ultimate goal of establishing a socialist society. In this process, the trade unions were crucial agencies for progress. To be sure, it was necessary for the unions to link the struggle for immediate demands with the ultimate socialist goal, as well as to be the advocates of the entire working class and not merely of a select "aristocracy of labor" composed of skilled workers alone. "They must convince the world at large," Marx emphasized, "that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions." At the same time, however, the Marxists could not remain aloof from the task of building and influencing unions until the opportunity arose to create the ideal trade unions. They must give guidance to labor leaders who were busily engaged in building the trade unions and seek to move them in the direction of the type of organizations envisioned by Marx.<sup>51</sup>

As we have seen, the Marxists did give such guidance and assistance. In his autobiography, Samuel Gompers wrote that the principles of the International, under Marxist leadership, appeared to him "as solid and practical." He acknowledged that as a result of the influence of the Marxists there developed a clearer understanding "that the trade union was the intermediate and practical agency which would bring the wage-earners a better life."<sup>52</sup>

The economic crisis of 1873 temporarily lessened the internal struggle within the International. Both the Marxists and the Lassalleans combined to mobilize the unemployed, and the International gained in influence as it organized and led their struggles. In a report to the French government on December 11, 1873, a secret agent noted that as a result of the economic crisis, "several members [of the International] were able for the first time to speak at meetings and gain the attention of the same American workers who had until then showed them only coldness and indifference." As a result of the participation by the International members, "some meetings borrowed from Socialist programs . . . *the right of every man without work to demand it from the state*, with an astonishing acclaim in a country where until now the best government to be appreciated and praised was the one which interfered least in private affairs." He concluded with the observation: "The action of the International, whether hidden or obvious, has an influence on [the workers]. One cannot blind oneself to it."<sup>53</sup>

He was right. Meetings of the unemployed in New York, Chicago, and other cities, called by the U.S. sections of the International, usually raised three key demands prepared in advance by the Internationalists: (1) work for all able-bodied men and women at the usual wage rate, and at an eight-hour day; (2) an advance of either money or produce sufficient to feed workers and their families in distress for one week; and (3) a moratorium of at least six months on rent. Wherever private



industry could not provide work for the unemployed, it was the duty of the governments—federal, state, and local—to fill the gap so that there would be “work for all who have no work and are able to work, with sufficient wages.” At a meeting at Cooper Union on December 11, 1873, attended by thousands, a “Committee of Safety” of fifty delegates, representing groups ranging from free-thinking liberals to those supporting the First International in the United States, was chosen to coordinate protest demonstrations in New York City. These efforts culminated on January 13, 1874, in a large gathering at Tompkins Square on New York’s East Side, where, without provocation, the police brutally attacked the workers, indiscriminately beating and wounding men, women, and children.<sup>54</sup>

“It was the International,” writes Kenneth L. Kann, “which assumed leadership in Chicago during the Depression, seeking the ideology, the organization, and the tactics which would give shape and force to the dissatisfaction, the anger, and the fear expressed in the unemployment demonstrations.”<sup>55</sup> However, the fact that the unemployed demonstrations did not bring any reduction in the suffering of the men and women out of work, and that their numbers continued to increase at an alarming rate caused the Lassalleans to characterize these demonstrations as useless. At the same time, workers in the United States were experiencing not only bitter unemployment during the “long depression,” but also wage cuts, lost strikes, and the wholesale destruction of the trade unions they had so carefully built during the preceding decade. Only a few unions managed to survive, and then only by accepting high unemployment and successive wage cuts.

As workers came to feel that unionism and strikes were futile, they gave a more sympathetic response to the Lassalleian argument that political action was the only way out for the working class.<sup>56</sup> Many workers believed that the government’s financial policies lay at the root of labor’s problems and that working-class political action would open the door to currency reform, which would enable producers’ cooperatives to be established—the Lassalleian panacea for all working-class problems, including mass unemployment. The Marxists, however, with the notable exception of Adolph Douai, viewed currency reform as just another device of middle-class reformers to divert working-class attention from the real issue—the struggle against the industrial capitalists.

Even some of the former staunch adherents of trade unions in the National Labor Union became disillusioned with trade unionism and began to listen with increasing acceptance to the Lassalleian arguments. Among them was Detroit’s Richard Trevellick, president of the NLU from 1869 to 1872. In the midst of the “long depression,” Trevellick

wrote that he had hoped that once the workers were organized, they would “teach each other not to strike, but to learn that the ballot box alone could save labor from slavery.” His response to the nation’s crisis, in which he saw his union, the ship caulkers, disintegrate, was to immerse himself in the movement for currency reform with the ultimate hope of establishing producers’ cooperatives through government financial assistance to the workers.<sup>57</sup>

The Marxists did not share the despairing conclusion that trade unions, strikes, and unemployed demonstrations were now all useless and that everything should be directed toward independent political action. They did not reject such political action, since they believed that every class struggle was a political struggle, but they maintained that the time was not yet ripe for the formation of a workers’ party strong enough to influence the elections. The trade unions, they said, were the cradle of the labor movement, and it was the duty of the U.S. sections of the International to both revive existing unions and to assist in the organization of new ones. The demonstrations of the unemployed should be continued, for such demonstrations secured relief for homeless and hungry families, stimulated workers to think along socialist lines, and presented opportunities for bringing home to the workers the message that only socialism could end the exploitation of the masses. Moreover, when political action was undertaken, it had to be based on the working class and not, as the Lassalleans advocated, as part of a coalition of whatever groups were prepared to join in the campaign for state aid to cooperative enterprises. In reply to a Chicagoan who had asked the General Council for information and material for the organization of an English-speaking section in that city, Sorge wrote in June, 1874:

An English translation of the very important resolutions on the political position passed by the late Congress at Philadelphia will be made and sent to you within a week. You will see by their perusal, that the IWA is taking a position against *all* political parties of the possessing classes and will take no political action except as *working class* opposed to all old and new political parties of the ruling classes, whether they call themselves Republicans, Democrats, Grangers, Farmers, Independents, Liberals or Reformers or whatsoever they might baptize themselves. “The emancipation of the working classes must be achieved by the workingmen themselves,” and it is therefore quite immaterial to the working classes which of the many factions and fractions of the possessing classes is *in* or *out* of power and office. We bide our time.<sup>58</sup>

The Lassalleans, however, were unwilling to bide their time. They were confident that the time was ripe for carrying their policies into



effect. In 1874, they left the International and established the Workingmen's Party of Illinois in the West and the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America in the East. The latter party emphasized that its goal was to take "possession of political power as a prerequisite for the solution of the labor question."<sup>59</sup> The Workingmen's Party of Illinois published a weekly organ in German, *Vorbote*, edited by the Lassallean, Karl Klinge. *Vorbote* placed great stress on the fundamental Lassalleian demand for state aid to cooperative societies. In keeping with Lassalleian principles, it announced that the Workingmen's Party of Illinois would have nothing to do with trade unionism, since "it never led to any lasting betterment for the workingmen in the several trades."<sup>60</sup> Armed with *Vorbote*, the Workingmen's Party of Illinois campaigned to convince the workers to forget about trade unions and concentrate all attention and energy on strengthening their power at the ballot box.<sup>61</sup>

As we shall see, however, forces were at work to heal the split between the Marxists and Lassalleans and to unite these two radical forces, even if temporarily, in a new movement—the Workingmen's Party of the United States.

## 2

## FORMATION OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

In the years 1874-1876, a succession of events occurred to bring about unity between the Marxists and the Lassalleans. In the 1874 elections, the Workingmen's Party of Illinois and the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America met with complete failure at the ballot box. The results could hardly have been otherwise. For example, the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, after announcing that it was seeking to organize all workers to take the necessary steps to assume political power, proceeded to nominate a ticket in the fall of 1874 that was dominated by Germans, without a single native-born candidate.<sup>1</sup> As might be expected, the ticket was soundly defeated.

Even if this had not occurred, however, it is difficult to see how the Workingmen's Party could have advanced politically while it was publicly dismissing the importance of trade unions and their struggles to maintain wage standards and was rejecting any idea of cooperation with such unions as still existed.<sup>2</sup> In any event, the political results of 1874 strengthened the hands of a number of Marxists in the West and East who had remained silent about the trend toward relying exclusively on political action, in order not to risk expulsion from the two Lassalleian-dominated political parties. Now, however, they spoke out vigorously, pointing to the disastrous results at the polls as vindicating the Marxist contention that premature political action before the workers were more effectively mobilized in trade unions for day-to-day economic struggles was futile, and they urged the parties to move in that direction.<sup>3</sup>

The Marxists made headway first in the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America. At a party convention in 1875, a resolution was adopted asserting that "under the present conditions, the organization of working people into trade unions is indispensable, and that each party member is obliged to become a member of the union of his trade or to aid in establishing a trade union where none exists." *The Socialist*, the English-language organ of the party published



in New York City, hailed the resolution and called for "the defense of the trade unions and their principles upon every occasion, in order that the reorganization of society may be speedily accomplished."<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the participation of German-American Marxist trade unionists in the Workingmen's Party of Illinois resulted in pushing that organization into participation in a number of labor struggles which resulted in highlighting the importance of such struggles. The Workingmen's Party of Illinois became involved in its first strike in the spring of 1875, when the organization came to the aid of the lumbershovers, coal heavers, and brickmakers, all of whom had gone on strike against fresh wage cuts. (The cuts ranged from \$2.00 a day for the coal heavers to from \$.25 to \$1.50 a day for the lumbershovers). When the employers began hiring strikebreakers with the assistance first of the police and then of the militia, the infuriated strikers fought back militantly, battling scabs, police, and militia with stones and even guns.

Suddenly it seemed as if a large body of Chicago workers had demonstrated that they either were ignorant of, or had disregarded the Lassalleian dictum that it was useless to strike during these difficult depression years, and that they should devote themselves solely to the political arena. Faced with this sudden labor uprising, the Workingmen's Party decided to hurl itself into the midst of the action. During the brickmakers' strike, the party invited all the strikers to a meeting at Bohemian Turner Hall on the southwest side of the city. More than 2,000 workers gathered to hear German, English, and Czech speakers attack the capitalists for forcing more wage cuts upon workers already living below the subsistence level, and they insisted upon a more equitable distribution of the fruits of labor. While some speakers repeated the Lassalleian theme of the limited effectiveness of trade unions and strikes during the depression years, and of the need for speedy action at the ballot box, others emphasized the importance of trade unions and militant strike action. All the speakers, however, were united in the view that the increasing use of police and the militia to crush strikes and unemployed demonstrations made it necessary for the workers to begin military preparations—organizing, drilling, and acquiring arms for the approaching day when they would defend and liberate themselves.

Throughout the labor upheaval of 1875, the Workingmen's Party of Illinois staged meetings in support of the strikers and formed committees with Czech, German, Polish, and Irish workers to meet with employers and the police. When the strikers were arrested for clashing with the police and militia, the socialists defended them. They urged crowds to appear in court with those arrested and to assemble before City Hall and demand intervention by the municipal authorities in behalf of the strikers.

The results of the strikes were truly outstanding for the period. The workers defeated the attempts to cut their wages, an outcome that was really remarkable after years of unchallenged wage cuts all over the country. During this "cry of rebellion," as the *Workingmen's Advocate* called the strikes, the Chicago socialists had buried their differences and united in support of the workers. While the Lassalleans still preached political action as the real solution, they now agreed with the Marxists that strikes, even during the depression, were far from useless.<sup>5</sup>

While this was occurring in Chicago, several Marxist members of the International—J. P. McDonnell, Friedrich Bolte, and one or two others—were helping to promote trade unionism through the Association of the United Workers of America. Organized in 1874, the UWA did not prohibit political activity, but its General Rules placed the greatest emphasis on the need to first bring the workers into trade unions and into mass struggles against wage reductions and for wage increases. It was by these means, the UWA insisted, that a movement could be built which would "lead to and culminate in" the complete emancipation of the working class.<sup>6</sup>

While all this was developing in the United States, the Lassalleans and Marxists in Germany achieved a reconciliation. At the famous Gotha Congress of 1875, the two groups finally worked out a mutually acceptable program. Even though Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, deplored the concessions to the Lassalleans, the Social Democratic Party of Germany which emerged from the unity congress was basically Marxist in orientation. For one thing, it reflected the importance of work in building trade unions, a theme the Marxists (or "Eisenachers," as they were called after the Congress in Eisenach), under the leadership of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, had repeatedly emphasized. The German example influenced socialists in the United States, and in the fall of 1875, socialist unity was the predominant issue in both Marxist and Lassalleian circles.<sup>7</sup>

On April 16, 1876, at a convention in Pittsburgh, the first concrete steps were taken to achieve this goal. Although sponsored by the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party, it was attended by socialists of all tendencies, and out of the gathering emerged a "Declaration of Unity" which proposed a unified movement to be called the "Socialist Labor Party of the United States of North America." The unified party's platform clearly reflected the dominance of Marxist thinking. Thus it declared:

The emancipation of the laboring class must be achieved by the laboring class itself, independently of all bourgeois parties.

The struggle for the emancipation of the laboring class is not a struggle for privileges or monopolies of any kind, but for equal



rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule.

The economical subjection of the laborer to the appropriators of the means of labor is the cause of slavery in all its forms; of all social misery, mental degradation and political dependence.

The economical emancipation of the laboring class is, therefore, the great object to which every political movement must be subordinated.

All the great efforts heretofore directed to this grand need have failed through lack of unity among the manifold branches of labor in each country, and through the want of a solidarity of the laboring classes of the several countries.

The emancipation of the laboring class is neither a local nor a national, but a social task, common to all countries in which modern society exists, and dependent for its accomplishment upon the practical and theoretical cooperation of the more progressive countries.

The Socialist Labor Party of the U.S. of N.A. is based on the foregoing principles; and it is a centralized *national* organization, which presupposes *international* action; by making appropriate connections with the socialist labor parties of all countries having the same object.

In addition to its emphasis on the primary importance of the "economical emancipation of the laboring class," and on the formation of a party as a "centralized *national* organization" that presupposed "*international* action," the platform also stressed a basic Marxist electoral strategy. Even while planning to take an "active part in the politics of the country, both in general and for obtaining legislative enactments, only in the interest of the working class as such," nevertheless

no election movement shall be undertaken by the party before it is strong enough to exert a perceptible influence and said influence shall first be exerted in city and town elections; for which purpose, of course, also demands of a merely local character may be formulated, provided these be not at war with our general demands—Economically, it aims at organization of the trade unions on a national and international basis, for the improvement of our economical condition and for the spreading of our ideas and principles.

Finally, the "Declaration of Unity" issued a call for a Union Congress to be held in Philadelphia toward the end of July, 1876, to which the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party, the International Workingmen's Association, the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, and the Social Political Workingmen's Society of Cincinnati each would send one delegate for up to five hundred dues-paying members in good standing, and an additional delegate for each additional five hundred

members in good standing. "Immediately after the completion of the labors of said congress all the societies therein represented shall enter the newly organized party."<sup>8</sup>

The "Declaration of Unity" was received enthusiastically in socialist circles. "Every socialist awaits the 19th day of July with joyful excitement and hopeful tension as the day when particularism within the American Social Democracy will be buried to make room for a unification in organization and education," wrote a correspondent in *Vorbote*. He warned, however, that unless care was taken that the unified organization was based firmly on the principles of the International Workingmen's Association, it would not long survive: "The glorious idea of the brotherhood of peoples is embodied in the IWA," and the new movement must make certain to continue this "glorious idea."<sup>9</sup>

There were several proposals concerning a correct name for the new organization. The word "socialist" was objected to in the title on the ground that it would frighten English-speaking workers; instead, either "United Workers of North America" or "Farmers and Workingmen's Party" was suggested. However, one commentator observed shrewdly: "In any case, we will be called communists regardless of what name we adopt."<sup>10</sup> This proved to be an accurate prediction.

Section 5 of Milwaukee, the only women's section of the International in America, was not satisfied with the plank in the "Declaration of Unity" dealing with women workers. This plank called for "regulation of female labor in industries" that were "injurious to health or morality," and for equal wages for men and women. But Section 5 complained that it said nothing about political and social equality for women.<sup>11</sup>

A lead editorial in *Vorbote* in the early summer of 1876 was entitled "On Unification." It pointed out that just when the Centennial Exhibition celebrating the nation's one hundredth birthday was in progress in Philadelphia, delegates of various socialist groups would be arriving in that city. It continued:

They will not bring attention to themselves with banquets and other spectacles as the bourgeois conventions which will be held during the Fair in Philadelphia. Their business is serious and important—the creation of a unified, centralized, healthy Socialist Workers' Party which is capable of life and further development. . . .

With joyous hopes and with complete enthusiasm we are going to Philadelphia to shake the hands of the brave comrades who will with us bring this holy work to a happy conclusion.

Down with exploitation and servitude! Down with the splintering of forces and indifference! Long live the unification of



American Socialists! Long live the unification of the workers of all nations!<sup>12</sup>

On July 4, 1876, the day the nation celebrated its one hundredth birthday, the socialists of Chicago, organized in the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, held their celebration in Ogden's Grove. The celebration, the last for the party before it dissolved and merged with other socialists into a new unified movement, opened with a parade down Randolph Street. Leading the parade was the *Lehr und Wehr Verein*, an armed club of German socialists formed after the 1875 strikes to protect workers against police and military assaults. Dressed in white pants, blue blouses, and black hats, "drilled as a corps of light infantry, they marched with fixed bayonets." They were followed by the United Cabinet Makers Union and then by a car bearing "a beautiful girl whose classic features were surmounted by a 'cap of liberty.'" Immediately after came the Bricklayers Union, followed by the Socialistic Bricklayers Union, and then came the *Vorwärts Turnverein*, another armed group, uniformed in white, with gleaming rifles, and marching in regular military cadence. Another group of Turners—the *Fortschritt*—followed, and then the trade unions representing every craft in Chicago brought up the rear.

Arriving at the Grove, the marchers heard speeches by John McAuliffe of Chicago and Joseph Brucker and Gustave Lyser of Milwaukee—the latter the editor of the *Socialist*, the daily German newspaper of Milwaukee. In his speech, Brucker was reported as declaring that the revolution of 1776 was "a great one, but it was only adapted to that age; greater revolutions, greater reforms were needed now; there were no kings to dethrone, but there was a whole suffering mass of people who demanded their rights, and if the great men of the revolution were alive, there was no doubt but that they would help the people to get them." They would certainly approve of the unity congress soon to be held in Philadelphia which could do for the revolutionists in 1876 what the Continental Congress did for the revolutionists in 1776.

McAuliffe, however, struck a different note. He argued that the revolution of 1776 was "inspired by capitalists" who paid all the taxes and could therefore argue with some justification that they were victims of "taxation without representation." However, in 1876, the capitalists had all the representation but paid none of the taxes. It was the producers who paid the taxes, and they were justified in demanding "full representative rights for all including the millions of disfranchised." He agreed with Brucker that the unity congress in Philadelphia would usher in the next century of American independence, an independence to be built on a new social order, the society of socialism:

the best of all social systems . . . and he or she will prove most patriotic, most loyal to the nation and humanity, who does most to pile high the clods upon the coffin-lid of the old, and works most diligently and wisely to rear the new. Here, in the now of all time, we reverently bid good-bye to the old century, to the defunct (capitalist) system and joyfully greet the new; unitedly pledging our allegiance, with three times three Hurrah—Hurrah!

The huge crowd burst into "hurrahs," and then the secretaries of the meeting, Philip Van Patten and Jacob Winnen, read, in the English and German languages, a new Declaration of Independence for the Second American Revolution to be ushered in at the unity congress in Philadelphia. Modeled after the original document, the socialist Declaration of Independence justified the Second American Revolution by exhibiting "facts to a candid world," among which were:

The present system has enabled capitalists to make laws in their own interests to the injury and oppression of workers.

It has made the name Democracy, for which our forefathers fought and died, a mockery, and a shadow, by giving to property an unproportionate amount of representation and control over legislation.

It has enabled capitalists, through their control over legislation, to secure government aid, in land grants and money loans, to selfish railroad corporations, who, by monopolizing the means of transportation, are enabled to swindle both the producer and the consumer and who, through corrupt and fraudulent management, have become involved in bankruptcy, thus evading their obligations and robbing the public.

It has allowed capitalists to trample on the most sacred rights of American citizens, by dispersing and shooting down the workingmen when they have peaceably assembled together to discuss their wrongs and the means of redress.

It has allowed capitalists to rob mankind of the benefits of progress, by using the grand inventions in labor-saving machinery to still further enslave us, instead of reducing the hours of labor in proportion to the time saved by its use, and thereby giving employment to the thousands whose labor is superseded by machinery.

It has prevented mankind from fulfilling their natural destinies on earth, crushed out ambition, prevented marriages or caused false and unnatural ones, has shortened human life, destroyed morals and fostered crime, corrupted judges, ministers and statesmen, shattered confidence, love and honor among men, and made life a selfish, merciless struggle for existence instead of a noble and



generous struggle for perfection, in which equal advantages should be given to all, and human lives relieved from an unnatural and degrading competition for bread.

Since petitions for justice, "in the name of humanity, for the sake of our starving wives and children," had been "answered only by sneers and cold denials," and since officials elected by the workers had been corrupted by "the power of capital," there was no alternative but to demand "a radical reform throughout our entire social and political system."<sup>13</sup>

On July 15, 1876, ten delegates from nineteen U.S. sections of the International Workingmen's Association, representing at most about six hundred members in good standing, arrived in Philadelphia to dissolve the First International and elect delegates to the unity congress.<sup>14</sup> So precipitous had been the decline of the once-powerful International that when the French government, fearing that a Parisian trade-union delegation visiting the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition might be dangerously infected by the doctrines of the Internationalists, commissioned a secret report on the status of the organization, it was relieved to learn that factionalism and continuous internal dissension had reduced the International to a paper organization under the control of "Sorge and a few other puppets of Karl Marx."<sup>15</sup>

In the space of less than a day, the delegates dissolved the International and entrusted its archives and documents to Sorge and Carl Speyer. Sorge then presented his idea on how the principles of the International might be spread even after the organization's dissolution. He emphasized the need for avoiding foreign models, especially the German, and for the Marxists to achieve closer relations with the trade unions and bring their principles particularly to the native-born.<sup>16</sup>

Before adjourning, the convention adopted a proclamation which began:

Fellow Working Men:

The International Convention at Philadelphia has abolished the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, and the external bond of the organization exists no more.

"The International is dead!" the bourgeoisie of all countries would now cry out "with ridicule and joy," but there was no doubt, the proclamation went on, that the movement would never really die, and, indeed, would soon be resurrected:

The comrades in America promise you that they will faithfully guard and cherish the acquisitions of the International in this country until more favorable conditions will again bring together the workingmen of all countries to common struggles, and the

cry will resound again louder than ever: "Proletarians of all countries, unite."<sup>17</sup>

On July 19, 1876, the unity congress opened in Philadelphia. Seven societies sent delegations, but only four were considered in good standing and entitled to representation. Seven delegates were accepted: Sorge and Otto Weydemeyer<sup>18</sup> from the International; Conrad A. Konzett<sup>19</sup> from the Workingmen's Party of Illinois; Charles Braun from the Social Political Workingmen's Society of Cincinnati; and A. Strasser,<sup>20</sup> A. Gabriel, and P. J. McGuire<sup>21</sup> from the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America. The seven delegates represented approximately 3,000 organized socialists in the United States—635 in the International, 593 in the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, 250 in the Social Political Workingmen's Society of Cincinnati, and 1,500 in the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America.<sup>22</sup>

The unity congress lasted for four days and established a united socialist party to be called the Workingmen's Party of the United States. The name was chosen by a vote of 4 to 2. The platform was a result of compromise. It adopted the trade-union policies of the International, but conceded to the Lassalleian request that a national instead of an international organization be established. The national executive committee, to be located in Chicago, was dominated by Lassalleans. A further concession to them was made in a resolution advanced by McGuire and opposed by Sorge, Strasser, Weydemeyer, and Konzett, empowering the executive committee to permit local sections to enter political campaigns when circumstances were considered favorable. Again, over the objection of the Marxists, the platform endorsed the Lassalleian principle of governmental transfer of industrial enterprises to producers' cooperatives.

However, on the key issues of political action and trade unionism, the platform and principles of the party adopted the Marxist position. They enunciated the fact that the basis of the economic subjection of the workers lay in the appropriation of the means of production by the capitalists; that the struggle for emancipation had to be carried out by a united and independent international working class; and that the final goal was the abolition of the wage system and the creation of a classless society. The Workingmen's Party would approach the political question with care:

The political action of the party is confined to obtaining legislative acts in the interest of the working class proper. It will not enter into a political campaign before being strong enough to exercise a perceptible influence, and then in the first place locally in the towns or cities, when demands of purely local



character may be presented, providing they are not in conflict with the platform and principles of the party.

We work for the organization of trade unions upon a national and international basis to ameliorate the condition of the working people and seek to spread therein the above principles.

The view of electoral work as something to be engaged in *only* after the labor movement had grown stronger was given special emphasis in an additional resolution adopted on "The Ballot Box." This resolution argued that "only in the economical arena the combatants for the Workingmen's Party can be trained and disciplined," and that "the organization of the working people is not yet far enough developed to overthrow at once this state of corruption" which had permeated the electoral system in the United States. It also warned that "this middle class Republic has produced an enormous amount of small reformers and quacks," and that "silly reform movements" flourish especially during election campaigns, which "greatly endanger the organization of the workingmen."

The resolution concluded:

The sections of this party as well as all workingmen in general are earnestly invited to abstain from all political movements for the present and to turn their back on the ballot box. . . . Let us bide our time. It will come.

The official Program of the Workingmen's Party of the United States also included eleven demands:

1. Eight hours for the present as a normal working day, and legal punishment of all violators.
2. Sanitary inspection of all conditions of labor, means of subsistence and dwellings included.
3. Establishment of bureaus of labor statistics in all states as well as by the national government; the officers of these bureaus to be taken from the ranks of the labor organizations and elected by them.
4. Prohibition of the use of prison labor by private employers.
5. Prohibitory laws against the employment of children under 14 years of age in industrial establishments.
6. Free instruction in all educational institutions.
7. Strict laws making employers liable for all accidents to the injury of their employees.
8. Free administration of justice in all courts of law.
9. Abolition of all conspiracy laws.
10. Railroads, telegraphs, and all means of transportation to be taken hold of and operated by the government.
11. All industrial enterprises to be placed under the control

of the government as fast as practicable and operated by free cooperative trades unions for the good of the whole people.

Neither the united party's Declaration of Principles nor any of the eleven specific measures proposed "as a means to improve the conditions of the working class" dealt with Blacks, but a resolution was adopted dealing with women's rights. It acknowledged "the perfect equality of rights of both sexes," but said nothing of women's political rights. Instead, it emphasized that "the emancipation of women will be accomplished with the emancipation of men, and the so-called woman's rights question will be solved with the labor question."

The *Vorbote* in Chicago and the *Sozial-Demokrat* in New York were designated as the party's official organs, with the latter's name to be changed to *Arbeiterstimme*. The English-language organ of the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America was also declared an official organ and its name was changed from *The Socialist* to *Labor Standard*, with J. P. McDonnell, the Irish-American Marxist, chosen as editor. Dr. Adolph Douai, the German-American abolitionist, educator, and Marxist, was appointed assistant editor for all three papers.

In concluding the unity congress, the delegates let it be known that they were fully aware that "their work has no claim to perfection, but they are conscious also of having acted to the best of their abilities, and of having tried to give some aid and support to the working classes in their ever-increasing struggle for economic freedom." Therefore, they appealed:

Rise then, ye sons and daughters of labor! Rally round its flag, and help us to carry it to the heights of humanity! Alter and amend whatever we did wrong or may be impracticable, but join hands with us for the establishment of that fraternal union of the disinherited and downtrodden wages laborers, which will relieve us from the evils of capitalistic society.<sup>23</sup>

With the close of the unity congress on July 22, 1876, a unified socialist party, Marxist in orientation, came into existence for the first time in the United States. To be sure, important concessions had been made to the Lassalleans in order to maintain unity. While trade-union organization as a necessary prelude to further participation in politics had been repeatedly emphasized, provision was made for the National Executive Committee to allow party candidates to enter local elections where there was some prospect of success. Also, Chicago, a stronghold of the Lassallean socialists, was selected as the headquarters of the National Executive Committee, with the Chicago sections of the party to elect a committee.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the strategic



perspective which emerged from the program adopted advanced concepts that were fundamentally Marxist in perspective. They were:

1. Socialists should engage in persistent education through periodicals, pamphlets, discussion groups, and public meetings to bring their message to the working class.

2. Socialists should be fully engaged in the struggle for higher wages, shorter working hours, and improved working conditions through trade unions; in agitating for legislation to guarantee the eight-hour day, etc.—all of which would improve the conditions of the working class and give it a sense of its own dignity and collective power. The new consciousness thereby generated would make the workers more receptive to socialist educational efforts.

3. Out of such developing struggle and socialist education, a mass base would be created for successful socialist electoral work.

Probably because the delegates understood that the unity achieved at the founding congress of the Workingmen's Party of the United States was fragile, the decision was reached to dispense with a referendum vote on the action taken. Thus, the party began to function immediately after the congress.<sup>25</sup> Its existence was noted in the *New York Times* of August 11, 1876, which began the process of exaggerating its strength by stating that the new party "now numbers over fifty thousand members." At about the same time, *The Socialist* was observing that unity was more important than numbers:

#### UNION HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

The month of July 1876 shall be memorable in the annals of our history as the date upon which the thoughtful and earnest and well-disposed workingmen of America met in Philadelphia and united for their common interests. The labor organizations, represented at the Philadelphia convention, actuated by the highest motives and seeing the great advantages to be derived by united action, have forever abandoned all those jealousies and feuds that have so long disgraced and divided them. This glorious result is a matter of congratulations for the workingmen not only of America but of the entire world and gives hope for a bright and successful future for the cause of labor. . . .

Let us rejoice that we now have a United Party.

Success and Long Life to the Workingmen's Party of the United States.<sup>26</sup>

### 3

#### ORGANIZATION, EDUCATION, AND GROWTH

By the first week of August, 1876, the Workingmen's Party of the United States was a functioning organization. Its statutes and principles were ratified by the Workingmen's Party of Illinois and the United Workers of America, and the *Labor Standard* expressed optimism that more and more workingmen would be "falling into the ranks of the Workingmen's Party." Philip Van Patten, a native middle-class reformer who had joined the socialist movement, was chosen national secretary and issued the first announcement of the Workingmen's Party on behalf of the Executive Committee. Dated September 8, 1876, and issued from Chicago, it served notice "To the Workingmen of All Countries" that as a result of a convention in Philadelphia, the Workingmen's Party of the United States had come into being "upon a platform radical and comprehensive; and although the organization will be conducted upon a national basis, which is more popular and favorable to agitation, still the platform recognizes the necessity for an international bond of union between the parties of the different countries, and to secure this the Executive Committee wishes to enter into friendly relations and correspondence with all similar organizations throughout the civilized world."<sup>1</sup>

To join the WPUS, it was necessary to acknowledge its principles, statutes, and congress resolutions and pay monthly dues of ten cents. In addition, members were forbidden to belong to any "political body of the propertied classes."

The new member joined the party through a branch made up of ten or more members speaking the same language, at least three-fourths of whom had to be wage-earners. The branch was required to hold regular meetings at least every two weeks (including a monthly business meeting), to maintain friendly relations with and help build trade unions, and to "direct its efforts exclusively to the organization, enlightenment and emancipation of the working classes."

The officers of the branch, elected for six-month terms by majority vote, were to include an organizer (responsible for conducting "local



propaganda" and securing "concerted action" with other branches), one recording secretary, a corresponding secretary, a financial secretary (responsible for membership lists and dues collections), a treasurer, and a two-person auditing committee responsible for overseeing the financial records and auditing all bills. Each of these officers was to make a formal report to each monthly business meeting.

The highest decision-making body of the WPUS was the Party Congress, a gathering of elected delegates of the various branches to be held at least every two years. A seven-member Executive Committee—to be elected by the branches located in the city designated as the seat of this national body (which, as we have seen, turned out to be Chicago)—was responsible for seeing that Congress decisions were implemented. It was also responsible for coordinating educational efforts, for representing the WPUS at home and abroad, for establishing relations with workers' parties in other countries, for reporting four times a year to all of the branches on the organizational and financial condition of the party, and for organizing party congresses. The Board of Supervisors (to be located in Newark, New Jersey) had the responsibility of watching over the actions of the Executive Committee, the party newspapers, and the party in general. It had the power to "interfere in case of need," to "adjust all differences occurring in the party within four weeks after receiving the necessary evidence," and even to suspend officers and editors, although all of this was subject to a general membership vote and final decision of the Party Congress.<sup>2</sup>

As soon as the party began to function, appeals began to be addressed to the members through the party press, instructing them as to how to build the new movement. They were urged to appoint committees to make contact with trade unions and labor societies for the purpose of obtaining their endorsement of the party's principles and to secure subscriptions for its newspapers. One of these, the *Labor Standard* of New York City, reprinted an article in every issue entitled "How to Commence the Work of Emancipation," which stressed:

Talk to your fellow workmen and neighbors about the objects and progress of the Workingmen's Party of the United States and circulate any spare copies you may have of *The Labor Standard* among the best men you know.

Apply for copies of the paper to newsdealers and cigar stores in order that they may keep it for sale. Appoint committees to wait upon trade unions and labor societies for the purpose of obtaining their support for *The Labor Standard*. Have small handbills printed, setting forth the objects of the paper and circulate them in all useful places. If you require show cards, apply to this office and they will be sent to you.

Try to secure the cooperation of all those who are interested in the subject, to aid you in calling a meeting, and apply to the Executive to be admitted as a branch of the WPUS when you can get ten men to commence with.

Never mind how few you are at first, meet regularly, give your meeting the widest publicity, and your number will increase with the growth of the Party and the dissemination of the ideas expressed in *The Labor Standard*.

Appoint one of your members to speak every meeting night upon some labor topic, and when he is through, give your own ideas on the subject.

Let everyone who reads this paper constitute himself a committee of one to collect labor news—such as strikes, lock-outs, industrial disputes, oppression and tyranny of all kinds, miseries, political rascalities, etc.—jot them down on a Postal Card addressed to this office. Do not forget to send us from time to time papers containing labor items.

Let the present branches enter into a noble competition to increase the number of their branches, and form branches in neighboring places where none are existing.

Communicate freely with us concerning Party and other labor matters. Suggestions concerning increasing the efficiency of the paper and the strengthening of the Party will be thankfully received.

The newspaper expressed confidence that when these suggestions had been put into effect, it would not be long before the membership and the circulation of the press would be doubled, "and then the 'Workingmen's Party of the U.S.' will soon be in a position to prove its power in the noble work of the emancipation of the working classes from the present condition of dependence upon the capitalists for their daily bread."<sup>3</sup>

As part of its educational activities and appeals for membership, the WPUS distributed two important pamphlets: Friedrich A. Sorge's *Socialism and the Worker*, and Dr. Adolph Douai's *Better Times*. Sorge's pamphlet, the only piece of writing he published in English, first appeared in June, 1876, published by the Federal Council of the North American Federation of the International Workingmen's Association. It was advertised as "a refutation of the reproaches commonly made against the aims of the more advanced workers," and was immediately reprinted by the WPUS and serialized in the *Labor Standard*. (In 1884, it was republished by the British socialists).

After criticizing the usual picture of socialists as incendiaries and looters and explaining the true nature of the advocates of a new society, and after indicating specifically how the demands of socialists would, if realized, solve the problems facing the nation as it moved



into its second century, Sorge pointed out that, despite oppression, persecution, ridicule and scorn, "everywhere throughout the civilized world, socialism has taken root. Everywhere it has begun the struggle against capital, monopoly and class rule, and its victory is assured." Sorge briefly described the nature and virtues of a socialist society, concluding:

Freedom and equality will then no longer be empty and cheap phrases, but will have a meaning; when all men are really free and equal, they will honor and advance one another. The working man will then no longer be deprived of the fruits of his work, his property, and everybody who will work will be able to spend a good deal more on food, clothing, lodging, recreation, pleasure and instruction than can be spent at present.

But Sorge reminded the socialists that they must link the struggle for improvements under capitalism with the need for socialism before they could lead the workers to the point where they would be able to take over state power:

If the Socialist had nothing to offer the people but the consolation that Communism will bring help at some future time . . . this consolation would be poor. . . . They do not want to expect with resignation what may come after death. They demand a change of their unfortunate situation while living on earth.

Sorge then called for immediate struggles to increase wages and reduce the hours of the workday. This, he insisted, would eliminate unemployment, poverty, and crime. To accomplish this goal, he called for trade-union organization. He concluded that socialism was also growing in the United States, that its roots were in "the gallant endeavors" of the workers in their unions. The future of socialism in the United States, he was convinced, was linked to that of the trade unions:

They [the trade unionists] will transcend the narrow limits they made for themselves; they will expand and embrace the whole class of workers in this country as soon as they have overcome some prejudices, the natural outgrowth of their national conditions, and then perhaps, they will lead the van.<sup>5</sup>

Douai's pamphlet, *Better Times*, was published in October, 1877, with an introduction by the WPUS Executive Committee which stated:

We will endeavor to show in this short work the true principles governing the relations of Labor and Capital, and briefly offer the means of raising our class through legal and peaceable means, to the dignity of independent and enlightened citizenship with equality of opportunities and true freedom of the individual.

At the very start of his pamphlet, Douai asked, "Better Times! When will there be better times? How can we bring them about?" He went on to give a detailed description of the existing hard times, tracing them to the very nature of the capitalist system and blaming "planless production," inevitable under capitalism, for the existing economic crisis. What was needed, Douai went on, was "a regeneration of mankind" through socialism, and he insisted:

Whether we will or not, we must choose that way, because the growth of Capitalist oppression hurries to that gulf in which we all, together with Culture, Freedom, Progress, and Humanity would be buried unless we hurl into it that Capitalistic system itself.

"If today, by some miracle or revolution," Douai continued, "all the great private capitalists and their companies would be removed from our country, would we tomorrow be any poorer for all that? No, we would be richer." This was, he said, because they were the chief obstacle to the common ownership and rational use of the great economic resources of society. However, he quickly added:

Now, in fact, we do not propose such a revolution. We laborers are less cruel, more humane than our legal robbers. . . . We are ready for all sorts of compromises with them, provided they agree that after a reasonable period, all capitalistic titles or sham values shall be extinguished, and that we in the meantime shall have our burdens lightened, a generous system of universal education carried out, and guarantees for the future given.

He also referred to "a legislative compromise with our opponents for universal education and the eight-hour day."

What would induce the capitalists to make such a historic compromise? Douai pointed to the electoral gains of the German socialists and to the advances of the British trade unions. He wrote: "All over the civilized world the loud cry of the masses is heard that Wages Labor must give way to *Cooperation* of the laborers, only mental and bodily laborers, to the exclusion of representatives of capital." Douai, in short, harbored the illusion that the growing strength of the labor movement, through unions and electoral action, would be able to compel the capitalists to agree to both immediate improvements and the replacement of capitalism with socialism in a more distant future. Clearly, the disillusioning experience of the utopian socialists, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, who had also expected the capitalists to voluntarily surrender control over the economy peacefully, had made no impression on Douai.

Douai's conception of the role of the trade unions was also flawed. He insisted on the need for the "organization of Trades Unions on



a Socio-Democratic basis," which he took to mean: "They should collect Labor Statistics within their sphere, subscriptions to our Labor Papers, and Party demands at the hand of the Legislatures; they should join our public demonstrations, and take care that all their members may be converted to our party creed and membership." He urged that persistent efforts be made to convert existing unions to this perspective, but that "in the meanwhile corresponding Trade Unions should be founded on our own basis and induce the old Unions to join their action with ours wherever they sympathize with it." Douai also saw the unions as an integral part of the socialist state of the future: "The State or Nation [are] to be really Democratic, since no law can be passed but which was first compromised with the advisory body or the Parliament of all the Trade Unions. Every citizen [is] twice represented, once as a citizen in the Government, once as a worker, with his special interest in his Trade Union."<sup>6</sup>

Of the two pamphlets published and distributed by the WPUS, Sorge's was the more influential. The Douai pamphlet, however, gained national attention when he appeared as a witness before a committee of the House of Representatives set up to investigate "the General Depression in Labor & Business . . ." Douai handed the committee a copy of *Better Times* and urged it to pay special attention to the section in which he blamed "planless production," a regular feature of capitalism, for the depression. This section was reprinted in the press.<sup>7</sup>

Specific appeals were also addressed to special groups of workers indicating the benefits they would derive from joining the Workingmen's Party. In one such appeal entitled "The Teachers Should Join the WPUS," it was pointed out that while in every other profession, professionals determined policies and practices and it would be considered presumptuous for nonprofessionals to meddle in such affairs, teachers, on the other hand, were

not consulted in making school laws, framing plans of education, ordaining how teachers should be prepared for their calling, examined, appointed, dismissed, who should write the text books, select the teaching apparatus, how their services should be rewarded, and what should be taught in school.

Moreover, while the nation was being told repeatedly by its leaders that its future well-being depended on an educated citizenry, and that it was therefore essential that "all teachers should be lifelong professionals, free from worldly cares and troubles, rich in experience, influential in all matters of education and chosen from among the best talents and characters of the nation," in actual practice, the opposite prevailed:

The salaries are so low, the position itself so servile and hampered by politicians, capitalists and the clergy, the chances for a teacher to rise in life and station are so utterly rare, the freedom of a teacher to follow the dictates of his own conscience and professional convictions is so slender that teaching is not at all attractive for persons born to be teachers, that most teachers follow the profession only for a few years, as a stepping stone to some more profitable and influential vocation, that these persons do not care to prepare themselves thoroughly for it, that the teachers' *personnel* in the United States changes, on an average, once in three or four years; that hardly one in twenty is a life-long teacher—in fact *teaching is not a profession*.

This deplorable state of affairs—and it was growing worse every day—was not accidental. It was caused by "a great capitalist conspiracy . . . to make all the people's schools worse, and only those for the children of the rich better." Teachers were aware of this, and had written and spoken on the subject. But they felt that they were alone and had no allies. Not so!

All you need to encourage you in your efforts to stop the current that has set against popular education, is to know there is a party that will back you.

This Party is the Workingmen's Party of the United States. Read its platform, and you will find that it contains plans in favor of your efforts to make teaching a profession, a well rewarded and influential profession. This party is, by the very spirit of its programme, bound to do so. It strives for the elevation of all true workers and the teaching fraternity are workers, are acknowledged by us to belong to the most useful and indispensable workers. The enemies of that party, the capitalists, the politicians and all the hypocrites, are likewise *your* enemies. Those who live and thrive, without any real labor of their own, on the unrequited toil of the working class, and make all our laws, and determine how little shall be left to us for our livelihood, determine likewise who shall be teachers, what shall be their reward and influence, and what shall be the education of the working people.

You can do a great deal to stop the baneful rule of that class. You can form associations akin to our Trades Unions, to protect your own interests and those of the school; and you can spread our party convictions and aims among your own circles of acquaintance, and help us in organizing our party.

We are bound to win, because justice and humanity are on our side. When we shall be victorious, teachers will have an influential position. They will govern education according to the principles of their science and art. Their position will be entirely exempt from worldly cares, and they will be respected, not merely in



theory, but in practice. Our party is spread all over Europe likewise, and based everywhere on the same principles, especially as regards the high esteem in which it holds universal and the highest possible education. There are many teachers who more or less openly side with our party. Shall it be said of American teachers that they showed the cold shoulder to the greatest of all issues in the world's history—the emancipation of labor, and together with it the emancipation of all the oppressed?<sup>8</sup>

The unemployed were also the object of the party's attention. Shortly after the unity congress, a committee was appointed, with J.P. McDonnell as treasurer, to organize the unemployed in demands for public workers and, at the same time, to urge those fortunate enough to be employed to contribute to a fund established by the Workingmen's Party "for the relief of those members of their class who are destitute." The appeal went on:

The most dreadful consequences will result if we should allow the members of our class to become recipients of what is called *public charity*. Our unemployed fellow workers have already steeped too long in the slough of degradation without permitting them to become the inmates of jails or to eat the bread of humiliating charity.<sup>9</sup>

"Our Working Women" were an important subject of discussion in the party press, as well they might be, since they not only made up fully fifty percent of the working-class community, but comprised over ten percent of the industrial workers. Also, "they enjoyed the lowest wages and often the harshest conditions in the American industrial scene."<sup>10</sup> To remedy this situation, women were urged to join the WPUS. A correspondent in the *Labor Standard* who signed herself "A WORKINGWOMAN," spelled this point out very precisely:

It is impossible to give an estimate of the number of females engaged at sewing in this city. It is in all events certain that there are many thousands and it is equally certain that the majority of those are compelled to work out of dire necessity.

Let anyone observe between the hours of 7 and 8 A.M. and 6 and 7 P.M. the thousands of young girls, from 10 years upwards, who crowd the street cars, or drag their weary bodies along the streets and what conclusion can be arrived at but that they are being gradually murdered, murdered by overwork, by low wages, by want of proper food, by unwholesome habitations, and a host of other evils. . . . The fault is not that we have to work, but that our hours of toil should be so unnaturally long and our wages insufficient to furnish us with the bare means of existence. . . .

I hope you will fully ventilate the question of female as well as male labor. It is our common question. I hope you will advise the workwomen to organize in societies, not for the discussion of theories of "women's right" or other such nonsense, in which the real workmen take no interest, but for the protection against the rapacity of the common enemy of workmen and workwomen . . . the capitalist class.<sup>11</sup>

But while the *Labor Standard* and other party papers did "ventilate the question" of women workers, too often they placed more emphasis on the dangers of becoming involved in the "morass of 'women's rights'" than on the need to organize working women into trade unions and to wage a battle for equal pay for equal work. Furthermore, party discussions of the issue stressed that the real problem lay in the pressures that compelled women to work, and that major attention should be paid to getting them out of industry and back into the home. In his pamphlet, *Better Times*, Douai boasted that "the members of our party, as a rule, [are] intent on reflecting credit on their family life" by, among other things, fighting against "prostitution [and] the curtailment of family happiness by *factory labor* of women and children. . . ."<sup>12</sup> In neither Douai's or Sorge's pamphlet, nor in any of the party papers, was there a demand for woman suffrage.

By October, 1876, the WPUS had fifty-five sections—thirty-three German-language sections, sixteen English-language sections, four Bohemian sections, one Scandinavian, and one French. Even before the party's first anniversary in July, 1877, the membership had more than doubled to seven thousand members, with eighty-two sections (twenty-three of which were English-language sections).<sup>13</sup> Few of the members appear to have been women. In fact, only one women's organization—the Chicago Working Women's Union—appears to have been influenced by the WPUS. Organized by a handful of workingwomen in Chicago who were either members of, or friendly to, the WPUS, including Lizzie Swank and Elizabeth Rogers, its aim was to instill a spirit of unionism among workingwomen and convince them that unified action could bring improvements in their appalling conditions. It sponsored lectures and forums in public halls on the value of trade unionism. More often, however, the women met in private homes, where they could discuss other problems without fear of reprisals.<sup>14</sup>

The WPUS had designated three weekly newspapers as its official organs: in Chicago, the *Vorbote*, and in New York, the *Arbeiterstimme* (formerly the *Sozial Demokrat*) and the *Labor Standard* (formerly *The Socialist*). In addition, no fewer than twenty-one newspapers



supported the WPUS—including twelve German-language papers, seven English-language papers, one Bohemian-language paper, and one Swedish-language paper. Of these, eight were dailies. Only the three official papers, however, were subject to WPUS discipline and control.<sup>15</sup>

The *Labor Standard* was the most influential of the party's papers. In many ways, it was an impressive journal of working-class news and ideas. It began under the editorship of J.P. McDonnell, with a weekly run of 2,400 copies, with some 1,800 subscribers, and with at least 250 copies a week "distributed gratis for the purpose of propaganda."<sup>16</sup> Selling for five cents, it consisted of four large pages, six columns across, filled with newsprint and without a single graphic. On the first page, major news stories in the left-hand column would be followed by the "Weekly Review" (brief news items) and also a section entitled "Labor Movement" (likewise brief items, often sent in by readers). Additional news stories and news briefs and WPUS statements filled out the remainder of page one. On the second page were editorials, feature columns on philosophy and theory, opinion pieces on various social problems, serialized works, and finally, under the heading, "Voices of the Work People," letters to the editor. On page three appeared the "Platform and Principles of the Workingmen's Party," additional correspondence and serialized works, and excerpts from and comments on other periodicals under the headings of "Labor Press," "Opinions," and "The Capitalistic Press." On page four there was information on the availability of jobs, on wage rates in various trades and areas, lists of union meetings, lists of national labor unions (including officers and addresses), a variety of advertisements, a listing of "Agents of the 'Labor Standard,'" and every week, as has been noted above, the column, "To Our Fellow Workmen Throughout the United States. How to Commence the Work of Emancipation."

Among the leading features of the paper during its first year of existence were educational essays on the eight-hour day by Ira Seward; "A Workman's Refutation of the National Economic Doctrines by John Stuart Mill," by John G. Eccarius (a former leader of the First International); a translation by Otto Weydemeyer of "Extracts from the 'Capital' of Karl Marx," and most significant of all, a report from Frederick Engels, written especially for the *Labor Standard*, on "The Workingmen of Europe in 1877."<sup>17</sup>

Occasionally a story would appear in the paper, such as "New Year Bells," by F.A. Foran. It concerned a working-class hero named Robert Layson, who was described as follows: "He was tall, manly and good-looking; he walks firm, erect and boldly, but exhibits no trace of swagger or bravado, or constrained formality. His manner is natural,

graceful, affable, and very attractive."<sup>18</sup> Poetry and labor songs appeared more frequently. Typical of the poetry was Gerald Massey's "Independence of Labor":

Fling out Labor's banner! its fiery front under  
Come gather ye, gather ye, Champions of Right!  
And roll 'round the world with voice of Truth's thunder,  
The wrongs we've to reckon, oppression to smite.  
They deem that we strike no more like the old Hero-band,  
Victory's own battle-hearted and brave!  
Workingmen, brothers mine, it were sweet but to see ye stand,  
Triumph or tomb welcome, Glory or Grave! etc.<sup>19</sup>

"The Strike," a labor song composed in support of a strike of New York cigarmakers, was featured in the *Labor Standard* of February 3, 1877. It went in part:

From factory, mine, from shop and field,  
United our interests all alike;  
The cry is raised, no longer yield,  
For homes and freedom we must strike.

Some say that strikes are ill-advised,  
At best we lose more than we gain  
Yes, brothers, starve 'till they've devised  
A way to forge a stronger chain.

Through suffering, want and haggard care  
One lesson we've learnt full well;  
Give them the plenty, and our share,  
For all they care may go to h—.

Such schooling for the last few years  
Have wakened freemen into life,  
Dispelled the coward's idle fears,  
Resolved to conquer in the strife.

Thus ill paid labor roused at last  
Against oppression's tyrant power,  
Strike in the new, strike out the past,  
And every Despot's standard lower.<sup>20</sup>

Neither the official organs nor any of the papers which supported the WPUS were concerned with the issues of the final phases of Reconstruction in the South, the organization of Black workers, or even the recruiting of Blacks into the party. Even when the disputed election of 1876 was followed by the removal of Federal troops from South Carolina by Rutherford B. Hayes as part of his "bargain" with the Southern Democrats—an action that assured the complete triumph of white supremacy in the South—there was only one comment in the



party press on the campaign and the "great betrayal" of the Blacks. This appeared in the *Labor Standard*, which called attention in its issue of September 23, 1876, to the fact that when the Black laborers on the rice plantations of South Carolina went on strike for an increase of fifty cents a day in wages, D.H. Chamberlin, Republican governor of the state, ordered the sheriff to call out the militia to protect strike-breakers. This was followed by the comment: "The interests of black and white laborers are the same and when they strike they find their friends: the Republicans, the Democrats, and the Greenbackers all agreed upon shooting them down."

The implication was that only the Workingmen's Party of the United States was the true friend of Blacks. But having ignored them at the unity congress and in the appeals to special groups to join the party, it is hardly surprising that few Blacks responded with any enthusiasm to this argument.

Unfortunately, this indifference to the needs of Black workers did not begin in the socialist movement of the post-Civil War era with the WPUS. Friedrich Sorge, who, it will be recalled, had been involved in the National Labor Union as a delegate from the First International in the United States, later recalled:

The prejudice of the Caucasians against the Negroes hindered the creation of labor organizations and the formation of a healthy labor movement in many southern states. Although several congresses of the National Labor Union recommended the formation of unions among the colored working population, they had let the matter rest with mere words.<sup>21</sup>

But Sorge "makes no mention of the fact that neither he nor any other Marxists associated with the NLU did anything to press that organization to unionize Black workers and to understand their special problems."<sup>22</sup> The failure of the U.S. socialists to exert any influence in the Black community during the first decade of Reconstruction (1865-1876) is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the histories of the First International in America list not a single Negro member and only a handful of activities associated with Blacks.<sup>23</sup>

The WPUS did only a little better. To be sure, Blacks were not a major factor in the North, where the WPUS was strongest. But they were the key to the South, where they formed a majority of the population in some areas, the backbone of the agrarian labor force, and an important sector, even a decisive one, of the skilled workers. In 1865, there were approximately 100,000 Black mechanics in the South, as compared with 20,000 white mechanics. Blacks were also employed in large numbers as dock workers, in railroad construction (even as engineers and firemen on the railroads), in the brick-making

and ship-caulking industries, and in the tobacco industry. Moreover, with the end of slavery, growing numbers of Black workers were beginning to enter the job market in the North as well as the South.<sup>24</sup>

By 1877, when the WPUS was rapidly beginning to increase its membership and influence, the last of the United States military forces were withdrawn from the South, leaving the Blacks at the mercy of terrorism organized by the former slaveowners. The Radical regimes were all overthrown, to be replaced by racist, white supremacist governments which, closely allied with Northern business interests, slowly but surely imposed a system of peonage upon the Black population of the former plantations.<sup>25</sup>

Of these developments, the WPUS had nothing to say. It also had little to say about the rapidly worsening plight of the Indians during the very same years in which Radical Reconstruction was overthrown in the South. In the entire WPUS press, only one item dealt with this issue. It appeared in the news section on the *Labor Standard's* front page in the issue of July 28, 1877, and read:

The United States are fighting the Indian on the Walla Walla reservation. As usual the capitalists have broken their treaty with the poor Indians. A formidable Indian in the person of Chief Joseph has arisen and will likely treat the soldiers of our rulers to some Sitting Bullism.<sup>26</sup>

No Indians joined the WPUS, but some Blacks did. Their names and affiliations may never be known, since the socialist press, while making occasional references to Black members, rarely mentioned their names. We do know, however, about one Black American who moved into the socialist camp during this period. He was Peter H. Clark, principal of the Colored High School in Cincinnati.

Like other sections of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, those in Cincinnati had not taken any stand on the issue of Reconstruction in the South. At a meeting of the party on December 15, 1876, a resolution had been adopted declaring: "The late election was a series of crimes committed by both parties against the moral integrity of this free nation." The resolution went on to assert: "The interest of society demands that the Workingmen's Party of the United States be entrusted at the earliest period possible with the conduct of the United States Government." Finally, it announced: "Our only hope for the future welfare of the nation lies in cooperation at large, i.e., governmental control of all business." Nothing was said about the plight of Blacks in the South as a result of "the late election."<sup>27</sup> Yet in March, 1877, at a meeting sponsored by the Cincinnati sections at Robinson's Opera House, Peter H. Clark announced his support of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. From 1854 to 1872, Clark



was a Republican. At that time, incensed at the failure of the Republicans to protect the citizenship rights of his people in the South, and concerned over the growing influence of industrial capitalists in the party, he joined the Liberal Republicans. He became disillusioned with that movement and returned to the Republican fold, while making it clear that he considered it unwise for the Negro vote to be "concentrated in one party." Although still a Republican, Clark was moving steadily to the left. A founder of the Colored Teachers Cooperative Association, he was a delegate to the 1870 convention of the National Labor Union, where he befriended William Haller, a socialist leader of Cincinnati (where Clark still lived), who had also been an abolitionist. In November, 1875, Clark addressed the local Sovereigns of Industry in Cincinnati, an organization concerned mainly with establishing cooperatives for the distribution of the necessities of life among wage earners.<sup>28</sup> Clark vigorously supported its program of producer and consumer cooperatives, condemned extreme wealth and poverty alike as "curses," and urged the regulation of capital.<sup>29</sup> The Republican *Cincinnati Commercial*, describing Clark's speech as "an intelligent review of the relations of capital and labor," summarized his remarks:

The question most pertinent to the poor man is whether it is better to give him a benevolent loaf of bread, or put him in the way of earning it. He was decidedly in favor of the latter. Any other way of helping the poor man was a delusion and a snare. All methods at mere benevolence crushed the manhood out of him, and degraded and debased him.<sup>30</sup>

However, Clark still remained a Republican; he attended the 1876 Republican National Convention and publicly supported the candidacy of Rutherford B. Hayes.<sup>31</sup> But toward the end of that year, his radicalism began to emerge clearly. On December 10, he addressed the Cincinnati Workingmen's Society on "Wages' Slavery and the Remedy." In the course of his speech, he condemned the "inordinate concentration of capital" and "large fortunes" as being "contrary to the welfare of society and to the interests of capital itself." He urged "the gradual reformation of the laws of society and of Government" as well as "thorough, intelligent, honest, and faithful labor organizations." Capital, he maintained, had to "give up some of its assumed selfish rights and give labor its share."<sup>32</sup>

When Clark announced his renunciation of the Republican Party and his support of the Workingmen's Party on March 26, 1877, the socialists who were gathered at Robinson's Opera House "heartily applauded," and they interrupted his speech with cheers. Clark bitterly

denounced the notion that the interests of capital and labor were the same and argued that the conflict between them "drenched the streets of Paris with blood, accounted for . . . strikes in England, the eviction of small tenants in Ireland, and the denial to the freedmen of the South of the right to purchase the land they till." He went on:

Go to the South and see the capitalists banded together over the poor whites. They carefully calculate how much, and no more, it will require to feed the black laborer and keep him alive from one year to another. That much they will give him for his hard labor, on which the aristocracy live, and not a cent more will they give him. Not a foot of land will they sell to the oppressed race who are trying to crowd out the degradation into which capital has plunged them. And here in Ohio nothing but the bayonet of the militia alone has kept the miners of the Southwestern part of the State groveling in the dust. Here in Cincinnati we have the working woman working hour after hour with her needle to eke out a bare existence. The great middle class of society is being crushed out.

The Black educator pointed out that while the middle class was being pushed into the ranks of the working class, the "millionaires" were growing in number. Only a few years before, he said, there had been just a few "millionaires" in American society, "but now they jostle each other in the streets while the men—the great mass of men—who toiled . . . to make the city what it is, have passed away in poverty and obscurity." He described his own bitter experience: unemployed for months on end, his wife and baby starving, and so desperate that he felt "like throwing himself in the river, and thus ending all his misery." It was then that he first understood what it meant to be unable to find work in the existing society through no fault of his own. Clark insisted that he did not hope for violence and that reforms would come "one by one." But he went on: "Capital must not rule, but be ruled and regulated. Capital must be taught that man, and not money, is supreme, and that legislation must be had for man." Dismissing the argument of the *laissez-faire* school that the less government the better, he insisted that government "is good; it is not an evil" if it were used in the interests of the working people. It was the government's duty "to so organize society that honest labor should not feel such oppression to drive it to desperation" as he had been driven during his months of unemployment.<sup>33</sup>

It was a remarkably moving speech, and *The Emancipator*, official organ of the Workingmen's Party of Cincinnati, called it "decidedly the best of the evening."<sup>34</sup>



Having joined the Workingmen's Party, Clark began to speak for the cause at street-corner meetings and trade-union gatherings. Soon, however, like practically every other member of the Workingmen's Party, he became involved in the dispute developing over political action and trade unionism—in short, a revival of the old battle between the Lassalleans and the Marxists.

## 4

## THE GREAT DEBATE

Writing in retrospect, Friedrich A. Sorge commented that, despite the formal unification of the socialist movement, "no real unity reigned among the disparate elements, that is no unity which is based on conformity of principles and tactics, and thus disagreement soon broke out again."<sup>1</sup> It took exactly two months before these "disagreements" surfaced. On September 16, the New Haven section of the WPUS, citing special local conditions which would allow it to "exercise a perceptible influence" through electoral activity, requested permission from the party's Executive Committee to launch a local election campaign. The Executive Committee granted such permission—"not without reluctance, however, as we have no wish to establish a precedent. . . . But since there is evidently a prospect for success in this instance, strike vigorously and unflinchingly, and you may win a glorious triumph for Justice and Harmony."<sup>2</sup>

The *Labor Standard*, edited by the Irish-American Marxist, J.P. McDonnell, was already known for its opposition to "premature electoral efforts." McDonnell had invited Marx to contribute to the paper so that U.S. workers might learn what policies to pursue. When this was not possible, he published a series of articles in English by Adolph Douai on Marx's *Capital*, in the course of which Marx's emphasis on the need to organize workers for the struggle to advance their immediate needs, and particularly for the reduction of working hours, was made clear.<sup>3</sup> The *Labor Standard* had also published a series of letters from P.J. McGuire, the organizer of the New Haven WPUS, in which he had described an iron moulders' strike, had gone on to mention union organizing efforts among longshoremen, and concluded: "There is a great necessity for a Wood Workers Union, composed of carriage makers, carpenters, etc. An Amalgamation of this kind is the only safety for us." This had appeared in the September 7, 1876, issue, and on September 30, the *Labor Standard* carried "An Appeal to the Workingmen's Party of the United States," written by McGuire,



requesting contributions to a strike relief fund to support the iron moulders. On October 21, a letter from McGuire mentioned the efforts of a newly organized Waiters' Union of Black workers and reported on the progress of the iron moulders' strike.<sup>4</sup>

Since McGuire was viewed as a dyed-in-the-wool Lassallean,<sup>5</sup> his articles and letters led the Marxists to believe that the opposition in socialist ranks to trade unionism and the struggle for immediate improvements had more or less been laid to rest. Hence, the request of the New Haven WPUS, of which McGuire was the organizer, came as a shock to the Marxists, and the granting of permission by the Executive Committee, however reluctantly, only increased their alarm. Although McDonnell published the New Haven-Executive Committee correspondence, he simultaneously reprinted one of the last reports of the IWA sections of North America, analyzing the reason for refraining from premature electoral activity, and also prominently displayed the party's "Ballot Box" resolution.<sup>6</sup>

But McGuire would not get the message. On the contrary, in the October 21 issue of the *Labor Standard*, he described with almost lyrical joy the electoral campaign in New Haven. It now seemed to the Marxists that McGuire's enthusiastic reports about unions and strikes had only been a screen behind which he intended to use the New Haven section to lead the WPUS down the electoral path, at the very moment that the party was beginning to be influenced by the recognition of the need to devote all attention to building the trade unions. As they saw it, the disastrous decline in membership that the unions had suffered during the preceding three years had made the need for organizing drives more urgent than ever. In some cities there was not even a trades' assembly of the unions still alive, and there were all too few newspapers that represented the interests of labor. In general, the trade unions were too feeble to play a role in protecting the workers' interests. All this had to be changed, and the WPUS, in the eyes of the Marxists, would be the instrument for such change. The main task was to aid in reviving the existing unions and in establishing new ones—in short, to organize the unorganized. The Marxists were aware of the fact that most of the existing unions were geared to the needs of the skilled craftsmen, who were jealous of their privileges (such as they were in a time of depression), unwilling to admit the unskilled and semiskilled workers into their organizations, and often indifferent to the plight of the unemployed workers who were living on the edge of starvation. But the Marxists believed that it was the duty of the Workingmen's Party to influence these unions (as well as any new ones that were organized) and press them to the point where they

would "embrace the whole class of workers in the country. . . ." To remain aloof from the unions, they were convinced, would be a fatal mistake.<sup>7</sup>

The Marxists were not content to just sit by and deplore the revival of the trend toward political activity before the task of building the unions had hardly gotten under way. They launched a campaign to educate WPUS members on the need to abide by the party's Declaration of Principles and to formulate an effective trade-union strategy. The effort got under way in the *Labor Standard* of October 21, 1876, the same issue in which McGuire was euphorically describing the electoral campaign in New Haven. This opening shot in what was soon to become a public debate in the form of editorials, articles, and letters to the editor, was J.P. McDonnell's editorial, "The Necessities of the Hour," which was shortly thereafter reprinted in several trade-union journals. The Marxist editor argued that "the working class, before it can destroy the present system, must be relieved from long hours and low wages," and that through the battle for immediate improvements of their conditions by effective trade-union methods, the workers' organization and understanding would grow to the point where labor's cause would be irresistible. "The political reformers," he warned, "have a business of their own to attend to and cannot be expected to neglect their interest for ours." Only the workingmen could attend "to the workingmen's business"—a "business" which was of no interest "to the politician, the banker, the lawyer, the merchant or the employer," whose "business is to make profit from our industry and to give us as little as possible in return." What, then was the business of the working class? McDonnell answered:

Is it not to look after our health and legitimate enjoyment of life? Can we have health if we are stowed away in ill-ventilated, crowded workshops or worked an unnatural number of hours? Can we enjoy life if our wages are so low that we constantly fluctuate from semi-starvation to abject want? Our business is plainly to work for the reduction of our hours of labor and the constant increase of our wages. Can any other business be of more importance to us? By bringing about reduced work hours and increasing our wages we shall create more work and more happiness, not among a few but between all. This is the desideratum at which to arrive, and without it the period of our servitude will be postponed for years. . . . The existing system must and will be abolished, but to this end we must strive for the improvement of our present material condition.

Only through organization, McDonnell maintained, could the workers emancipate themselves. Past experience had demonstrated



that the "introduction of political schemes of all kinds, has been sadly detrimental to many organizations of labor. It has retarded the growth of some and utterly destroyed others. True labor questions have been too frequently made subservient to the ambitious ends of unprincipled adventurers and false theorists." All this had to come to an end: "The working class can no longer afford to be trifled with in such a manner. The tyrant, necessity, has us by the throat and forces us to do battle for the immediate amelioration of our condition." The "only hope" of the working class was to organize; thereby it would be able to "escape from the prison of poverty and never-ending despair."

Preaching will not emancipate us. Poetry, let it be ever so sweet, will not break our chains. Oratory, let it be ever so glowing, will not emancipate us. Fine theories will not give us bread for our little ones. . . . By this we mean that the workpeople of the United States must join and maintain their Trade Unions. . . . Any action but that for the immediate improvement of our condition is reactionary and false and must be opposed because it will retard the progress of Union and does not meet the necessities of the hour.<sup>8</sup>

Following up his first salvo, McDonnell, in an editorial entitled "Wages," argued that the demand for higher wages did not signify support for the wages system. "On the contrary," he went on, "everyone through necessity or principle, wars against low wages, [and] helps in no small measure to promote the destruction of the wages system." And he concluded:

It is in vain to strive for increased wages while hundreds of thousands remain in idleness in all parts of the country because those men may at any moment be brought into warfare with us by the employers. Until the employed workmen are organized in healthy unions and the number of the unemployed is largely reduced we need not expect any increase in our wages. The number of the unemployed will not visibly decrease until the hours of labor are reduced and for this reason it is to all our interests to make common cause with the unemployed and bring them into our unions. We can then commence a gigantic struggle for reduced hours and with reduced hours we shall have more employment and better wages. All workingmen and especially the members of the Workingmen's Party are bound by their most sacred interests to organize and agitate for short hours and good wages.<sup>9</sup>

At a meeting of the New York English-speaking Section of the Workingmen's Party in October, 1876, the Marxists, led by McDonnell,

joined forces with Strasser and several other former members of the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America to adopt a resolution which read:

Whereas trade unions are organized for the protection of the working classes against the rapacity of the employing class. Be it resolved—That we recognize Trade Unions as a great lever by which the working class will be economically emancipated, and we consider it the duty of all the members of the W.P. of the U.S. to support and promote their Trade Unions. Be it further resolved—That the organization of Trade Unions on a national as well as international basis is highly desirable.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the former Internationalists saw trade unionism as a necessary prelude to working-class politics and expected the new party to pursue this course in accordance with the platform and principles adopted at the founding congress. McDonnell, speaking for the Marxists, argued that this meant that it was necessary "to drop political action altogether for a good while yet, and in the meantime to organize the Labor Party [that is, the Workingmen's Party of the United States] and Trade Unions and to agitate in them labor questions *only*. There is absolutely no other way to a *future* victorious political action." He stressed the need for socialist education in order to build up "an army of workmen who cannot be bribed to vote for their enemies, who cannot be led astray by capitalistic issues, who will learn to think for themselves and to acquaint themselves with the true means of salvation, who will rather die than betray the cause of labor. Before we have such an army, it is utter folly to attempt political action." Patient organizing and educational work, he went on, were more important than appealing to voters in election campaigns: "The man who will not join the union of his trade and the labor party, and will not read its papers and documents, will not throw a vote that may benefit himself and his fellows. Much less can he be expected to help in effecting the greatest of all revolutions that ever was planned and demanded by the exigencies of the age."<sup>11</sup>

Following up on his rejection of premature political action, McDonnell explained at length the superiority of immediate trade-union action. First, he noted that the WPUS platform "makes it the duty of every party member to be, at the same time, a member of some Trade Union, or else to advance the foundation, numbers and enlightenment of Trades Unions." Three reasons were offered for this policy:

1. The economical emancipation of the laboring class cannot be effected but by that class itself, their organization and agreement in a common purpose. Trades Unions are a beginning of such



organization for the common defence of labor from the oppression of capitalists. It must, therefore, be easier to gather in the folds of the party, both the existing Trades Unions and the single laborers who are willing to join one of them, than to win over laborers who have not yet learned the value of organization.

2. Trades Unions, if wisely conducted, may confer *present* benefits upon their members by successfully resisting the curtailment of wages, the lengthening of the hours of labor, the truck system, the irregular payment of wages, the system of piece-work or of hour work, the competition of underpaid work of women and children, arbitrary shop rules and fines, in short—all the rules and guiles of capitalists. They may forward a beneficial system of mutual insurance and self-help, and educate their members into administrative and legislative experts, just such men and women as a future society will need more than anything else. All this Trades Unions of the past times have done, at least in a majority of cases and it is too late in the day to deny the fact. The Labor Party, on the other hand, cannot promise any present benefits to its members, but must strive to keep them as well-to-do as possible, because a laboring population in deep misery and despondency cannot afford a successful struggle for economical emancipation.

3. Trades Unions are of more than passing importance. The entire society of the times to come will consist of cooperative laborers' unions, each one responsible to all the others and to the state and to its members. The knowledge and skill which will be needed for this system of universal cooperation, cannot originate in a few days or months after a successful revolution—it must be educated in advance. The men to whom important future business interests are to be intrusted should have been put to the test before hand and can best be tried in Trades Unions.

An additional motivation was added: "Trades Unions, when aided by the Labor Party and in cooperation with it, are the best means to guard the latter from the intrusion of would-be reformers and revolutionists and to keep the power of the party in the hands of the wages class, the only trustworthy class." The would-be reformers might be "very well-meaning persons," though past experiences told a different story; they might even be "very intelligent and learned," but they were "not to the same degree sufferers under the capitalistic yoke; they have not gone through the same cruel experience, and rarely have the same interests as the wages slaves." As a result, they had rarely studied the history of the "struggle between capitalists and laborers," and instead sought not to improve the conditions of the wage workers by organization against the capitalists, but rather to dominate the working class, offering it "each his own invention of a patent medicine to the social disease." Experience had demonstrated again and again

that there was "no way we can keep the party pure and ultimately successful, without excluding from it well-meaning persons" who did not belong to the laboring class.

Finally, McDonnell called upon WPUS members in the unions "to spread enlightenment about social science, to clear up misunderstandings about the relation of capital and labor, to fully explain all the planks of the international labor platform, and to educate the members of the Party into good unionists and of the Unions into true party members and efficient experts of their trade and other useful topics. The Trades Unions should be guided to renounce political action until a powerful labor party can resolve upon beginning it. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

As might be expected, it was not long before the advocates of immediate political action began to fill the columns of the *Labor Standard's* correspondence section. P.J. McGuire led off with a glowing assessment of the WPUS election campaign in New Haven:

By means of the election campaign we have done more to spread our principles, and make an honest impression upon the minds of intelligent and far-seeking workmen, than all our agitation for one year previous. . . . During the campaign, we distributed 5,000 circulars in this city, explaining our platform and principles. We held several mass meetings and showed the workingmen the reasons why they should unite, and with their votes support their own candidates against the paid tools of capitalistic parties.

Describing the final campaign rally in detail, McGuire noted:

This mass-meeting was said by all—even our enemies—to be one of the greatest events of the whole campaign in this city. Many were the converts made to our principles. For the whole week it, and the success attending our ticket, furnished food for discussion amongst workingmen.<sup>13</sup>

The two WPUS candidates in New Haven were officially credited with over 600 votes each, outpolling the Greenback Party candidates for president and governor.<sup>14</sup> McGuire insisted that the WPUS candidates would have polled 1,000 votes had it not been for voting fraud: "This only furnished fresh food for agitation." He added: "Our men have gained useful and valuable experience, which they could never learn until they went to the polls and tried their hands at this new work." McGuire concluded vigorously: "Our movement is growing just in proportion as Capital expands. We must strike Capital at every vulnerable point, but at the ballot box is the most effective."<sup>15</sup>

The Marxists were not impressed. Where, they asked, was the fervent interest McGuire had displayed for the strike of the iron moulders, for the need for a union of wood workers, and an amalgamated union of carriage makers, carpenters and others in the trade? All this



had vanished in the headlong rush into politics, and while McGuire could still write about striking capital "at every vulnerable point," he simply was using this as a means of diverting attention from his Lassalleian belief that the "ballot box," whether or not the workers were well organized for political action, was "the most effective" weapon of the working class.<sup>16</sup>

But McGuire did not lack for supporters. William Haller, a prominent WPUS member in Cincinnati, agreed with McGuire that the ballot was "the most effective" weapon in the armory of the working class, declaring:

We need no other power than the ballot to relieve us of wrong and oppression. No greater educator was ever instituted. No question touching the interests of mankind is left free from the severe analysis of the political crucible. . . . Privileges once enjoyed by princes and kings only by the ballot are transferred to the voters.

Haller made a gesture toward the adherents of trade unionism, but insisted that he favored only "the foundation of 'trade unions' on a socialistic basis." Lest this be taken to mean that he was weakening his belief in the predominant importance of political action, Haller went on to express doubt that such reforms as the eight-hour workday could be won through strikes and "agreements made between 'trades unions' and greedy rapacious 'bosses' who will keep faith as long as selfish interest dictates or the labor market is not overstocked with laborers." Haller concluded that "the strong arm of the law must be invoked, or else that which the laboring classes gain under one class of circumstances will be lost under other conditions. . . . We must have the government in our hands, and to obtain this the ballot must be resorted to." He added that, for citizens in modern times, the political arena had become "the theatre in which the human intellect was developed. . . . At the polls and on the hustings, men seek for their distinction as men. Should we as a party stand idling away our time, our opponents will take the public attention." As the presidential election campaign intensified, he noted bitterly, "our members became excited and at last were largely demoralized. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

In another letter, Haller argued that it made no sense to reject political action until, for example, the eight-hour workday was achieved, because "to my certain knowledge for twenty-five years that demand has been made over and over, times out of mind, and what have we gained?" Nor was he deterred by warnings of political harpies and locusts preying on the working class: "Undoubtedly, the Workingmen's Party will find . . . that every means, foul and fair, will

be used to prevent its success. But is this a reason for not voting? If so, Trades Unions must also be disposed of, for the fact of their corruption is as patent as that of the ballot."<sup>18</sup>

McGuire picked up where Haller left off, and in a new communication, he insisted that the Marxists were distorting the meaning of the stand on trade unionism and political action adopted by the party congress. In founding the party, he maintained, it was understood that "we should favor the organization of Trade Unions *upon a socialistic basis* with international affiliations. Upon this the unity was effected. It was not understodd that we should favor *the existing form* of Trade Unions. Never! For they are our greatest antagonists at present and have been so in the past." Why waste time organizing the workers into trade unions, he asked, when the trade unions did not and would not support the party's principles, and after the party devoted time, money, and energy to organizing the unions, it would find itself deserted by the very organizations it had helped to create. If the unions stayed with the party, they would only do so in order to steer it into conservative channels, and would confine its activities to agitating for "a milk-and-water measure" like the eight-hour day, when what was needed was that it devote itself entirely to the achievement of socialism through the ballot box. Political action was the most important method for organizing U.S. workers for their emancipation:

We cannot successfully preach trade unionism in these hard times. Workingmen—members of our Party—find it difficult to pay even their ten cents a month to keep up the Party. How then can they support a Trades' Union, costing three times as much as the expense of membership in our Party? One form of labor organization in these hard times can exist only at the expense of the other. Besides—workingmen will ask, what is the use of supporting two forms of organization when one should do the work. . . . Political action is our greatest means of agitation. It will force the labor question before the minds of the American people.

Finally, he concluded, if trade unions could really help the workers solve their problems, what use was there for a Workingmen's Party?<sup>19</sup>

The former members of the International took issue with McGuire and defended the party's official position. They insisted that there was no conflict between trade unionism and political action. The two complemented each other. To be sure, trade unions tended to be narrow, but they were not inherently hostile to socialism, and, under the party's direction, they could be brought to see that improvements such as higher wages and shorter hours, while important, would not



fundamentally solve the problems of the working class under capitalism. Nevertheless, the struggle for these immediate demands was important, both for the betterment of the conditions of the working class and in order to train them in the movement for socialism. This was particularly true of the eight-hour day, which not only was not a "milk-and-water measure," as McGuire sneeringly charged, but was "the most political of all measures." Admittedly the trade unions were not broad enough to include all workers, but it was the duty of the socialists to broaden them. The fact that they did not readily accept advice from the socialists was no reason for writing off the trade unions. This would be nothing but a repetition of the mistakes of too many socialists in the past who devoted themselves to promoting a variety of utopian reforms while neglecting the immediate problems facing the working class. "Let us profit by the experience of the past," insisted David Kronburg, a former Internationalist, in a series of articles in the *Labor Standard*. And he went on to observe:

The first, and most imperative duty that presents itself is the reorganization and centralization of Trade Unions, on a national and international basis. These centralized organizations will express in collective form the aspirations, the sentiments, and the will of the working-classes. As a primary means to effect this most important object, we must agitate for the shortening of the hours of labor, as the chief plank in our platform; this is a matter of vital importance.

On the question of the usefulness of a party in addition to trade unions, the Marxists argued:

There is every use for our party. It can do the work which the unions cannot *at present* accomplish. It can agitate and create intelligence on economical questions. It can make war on the errors of the past. It can arouse the people to the necessity for union and action. It can show itself the party of intelligence and wisdom by helping along every labor union, by working and agitating for the thorough advancement of labor which can only be affected in *labor* organization. It can hurry the masses into their unions, and the latter it can hurry on to centralized action. If we are to hurry the birth of a better future we must strive for a healthy present. Let us not be foolishly selfish because our party is not the entire labor movement. It is only an advance guard.

The Marxists agreed that the trade unions alone would not solve all the problems of the working class under capitalism and achieve a new and better social system. This required a combination of the party of socialism and the unions—a combination of the economic and

political struggles. But to rush into politics before the proper foundation was laid would be to repeat the errors that had doomed the political ventures associated with the National Labor Union and the National Labor Reform Party of the late sixties and early seventies. As the currency reform planks came to dominate the National Labor Union, more and more trade unions abandoned the movement, leaving it in the hands of the middle-class reformers. Its early demise then became inevitable. The same fate awaited the political action favored by the Lassalleans, for its premature character guaranteed that the movement would be taken over by non-working-class, middle-class reformers, each of whom would try to convert it to his own "patent medicine to the social disease." To prevent this, it was necessary to adhere to the principles of the party platform which stated clearly and unequivocally: "We work for the organization of the Trades Unions upon a national and international basis. . .," and again: "Whereas political liberty without economical freedom is but an empty phrase; therefore we will in the first place direct our efforts to the economical question." In short:

Trades Unions, when aided by the Labor Party and in cooperation with it, are the best means to guard the latter from the intrusion of would-be reformers and revolutionists and to keep the power of the party in the hands of the wages class, the only trustworthy class.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, what was at stake in the debate was an issue of the greatest significance for the future of the labor movement in the United States. To adopt the position that the struggle for improvements in the conditions of the workers, such as shorter hours and higher wages, was of no value; that only the immediate abolition of the wages system was worth fighting for; that the only trade unions worth supporting were those that were ready to commit themselves to socialism, and even then, only in order to recruit their members for the party and its political campaigns—such a policy would completely isolate the Workingmen's Party of the United States from important sections of the American working class.<sup>21</sup>

The pro-electoral forces in the WPUS were not persuaded by the Marxist barrage, since the electoral results showed that the socialist candidates in New Haven, Chicago, and Cincinnati had gained a large vote, and that six socialists had been elected in Milwaukee.<sup>22</sup> The Lassalleans were more than ever determined to ignore the official regulations. Indeed, the City Platform of the Workingmen's Party of Cincinnati, adopted on February 10, 1877, dealt entirely with political action and legislative demands and predicted that "the Workingmen's Party of the United States, in Cincinnati, if intrusted with municipal power," would solve all the problems facing the workers



of Cincinnati. Not a word in the entire platform referred to the trade unions or to work among the unorganized to bring them into unions. At the end, however, the platform announced: "Resolved, That we reaffirm the Platform of Principles adopted by the Congress of the Workingmen's Party of the United States at Philadelphia, July 19, 1876."<sup>23</sup>

As the Lassalleans intensified their attack on the Marxist view that political action should await the formation of strong trade unions, the dispute grew more heated, especially after the *Labor Standard* announced on January 27, 1877, that it would no longer publish any letters "at variance with our platform." From Chicago, Van Patten, speaking for the Lassallean-oriented National Executive Committee, responded that electoral campaigns were "the very best means by which (under certain circumstances) to attract the attention and respect of our fellow-workers to our practical demands." Moreover, he declared, the columns of the *Labor Standard* must remain open to such ideas. To further the Lassallean cause, the National Executive Committee dispatched McGuire on a national speaking tour. Finally, the Executive Committee placed J.P. McDonnell, the Marxist editor of the *Labor Standard*, under the supervision of a Lassallean co-editor.<sup>24</sup>

When this failed to intimidate McDonnell, the pro-Lassallean Social Democratic Printing Association refused the *Labor Standard* any further credit, while continuing to support the Lassallean *Arbeiterstimme*, the German-language organ of the WPUS, also published in New York. The *Labor Standard* was forced to suspend publication for two weeks. It reappeared on May 12, 1877, thanks to loans from former Internationalists, who also established the Labor Standard Publishing Association and appealed to the paper's readers and to WPUS sections for funds to run the paper on a private basis.

The National Executive Committee, however, did not relent in its campaign against the Marxist organ. The business manager of the *Labor Standard*, who was a Lassallean and occupied the same post on the *Arbeiterstimme*, was instructed to refuse to deliver the books to the new association, and he readily complied with these instructions. In addition, the Executive Committee announced that the *Labor Standard*, with its emphasis on trade unionism, was no longer an official organ of the WPUS, and it informed English-language members that they would do better to read the *Emancipator*, published in Cincinnati by the pro-political-action forces.

However, McDonnell, with the support of the former Internationalists, again refused to be intimidated and continued to call upon trade unionists to remain in their unions, to urge nonunionists to join labor

organizations, and to plead with members of the Workingmen's Party to organize their fellow workers. Articles from the pens of Frederick Engels and George Eccarius brought home to the readers of the *Labor Standard* the news of trade-union activities and labor struggles in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

In June, 1877, Adolph Douai made a valiant but vain effort to serve as an arbitrator between the warring factions. At a general meeting of the New York sections called for that purpose, he admitted that the trade unions were too narrow in their perspective and needed to alter their outlook and move beyond achieving higher wages and shorter hours. At the same time, he emphasized that to pursue the Lassallean course would only invite a repetition of the errors of the past—errors which had been responsible, to a large extent, for the failure of the labor and socialist movements to make headway: "Should we adopt immediate political action, our party would be in peril of being overrun by nonproletarian elements." But the Lassalleans rejected Douai's advice, and charged him with being a puppet of Sorge who was himself a puppet of Marx.<sup>26</sup>

During July, 1877, the conflict between the "trade-union" and "political-action" socialists that was tearing the Workingmen's Party of the United States apart subsided. For one thing, both the Marxists and the Lassalleans joined forces in celebrating the Fourth of July under the auspices of the Workingmen's Party. (They also joined in *not* celebrating: the Workingmen's Party of St. Louis—Marxists and Lassalleans alike—refused to march in that city's Fourth of July parade, even though they were officially invited to participate, on the ground that the plight of the nation's workers made the celebration a mockery.) Indeed, the *Labor Standard* enthusiastically featured the Fourth of July speech of Albert R. Parsons at the Workingmen's Party celebration in Chicago. Parsons, who was later executed as one of the martyrs in the Haymarket Affair, had been the party's candidate for alderman in the fall of 1876, and had received one-sixth of the total ballots cast in his ward. He was hailed in the Lassallean press as a future leader of their movement. But in his Fourth of July speech (reprinted in the *Labor Standard* from a paraphrased version in the *Chicago Tribune*), Parsons spoke like a Marxist.

Our forefathers had been in revolt against political despotism. The workingmen were now in revolt against the despotism of capital. Political liberty without economic independence was a fraud and a sham. He [Parsons] advocated the organization of trades unions, as without unity they would never succeed in bettering their condition. The trades unions should take united action in regard to all matters in the interest of labor, and no workingman



should vote for a political measure without previous action having been taken by the union. The trades union of the future would seek to furnish work to its members on the plan of good wages, short hours, and certain work.<sup>27</sup>

The *Labor Standard* did not reprint the opening paragraph of the article in the *Chicago Tribune*, which reported, under the blaring headline, "The Communists":

The English and Scandinavian sections of the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, more generally known as the Socialists or Communists, celebrated the Fourth like other patriotic people, thereby showing that they are not quite as bad as they are usually painted. While they are at variance with nearly everybody on almost every topic, socially and politically, they agree with all good citizens that the Fourth of July deserves celebrating. Some will be rather incredulous that Socialists or Communists should make this concession; but then it must be considered that the celebrants were not the ultra-German and French Communists of the Klinge's school, but the more sensible and rational English and Scandinavian portions of the society. While the latter complain of the present condition of the workingmen as much as the former, yet they are not in favor of upsetting the status of things socially and politically, in order to gain their end.<sup>28</sup>

The *Tribune's* account was inaccurate in at least two respects. As the *Chicago Times* noted in its report (published under the moderate heading, "The Workingmen"):

The various sections of the Workingmen's Party of the United States were represented in the procession. . . . After the Scandinavian section, the German, French, and English sections . . . formed in line, each section displaying its own flag.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, the various sections paraded with signs proclaiming their belief in the same principles—the abolition of the wages system and the establishment of socialism.

Events in Chicago demonstrated that there was actually a three-way division in the WPUS. There was the McDonnell-Sorge group representing the Marxists, who were also frequently referred to as "Internationalists." There were the Lassalleans, the McGuire-Van Patten group, who bitterly fought the Marxist program and were determined to completely change the party's platform with its commitment to first organize the trade unions on a sound basis before venturing into the political arena. Then there was the Chicago group made up of young workers who were leaders of the local socialist movement—printer Albert Parsons, cooper George Schilling, and machinist Thomas Morgan, who formed the core of a revitalized English section of the

Chicago party. While the Lassallean and Marxist groups in the WPUS continued to debate the merits of trade-union versus political activity, the Chicago group demonstrated that it was actively committed to both. Parsons, Schilling, and Morgan were among the most capable and active trade-union organizers in Chicago, each a leader in his own trade and each an advocate of local trade-union federation. But they also joined with older Lassalleans, like Karl Klinge and Jacob Winnen, to give National Executive Committee sanction to WPUS local political campaigns in the spring of 1877.

The Chicago group understood the Marxist fears that an undeveloped and immature labor movement would be easy prey for bogus politicians in the electoral arena and they agreed that recent labor history had proved that these fears were well-founded. However, they also understood the fears of the Lassalleans that if trade unionism became the only arena of action, the WPUS would become only the political party of the trade unions and would end up fighting solely for immediate demands. Hence they tried to bridge the differences between the two groups in the hope that the process of the daily working-class struggle would help unify the party.<sup>30</sup> In the summer of 1877, it appeared that this hope might be realized.

In one of his letters in the *Labor Standard*, Peter J. McGuire argued that as long as the depression continued, it was pointless to try to organize the workers into trade unions or for any other type of economic activity: "As long as the times are such that the majority of the people can just barely live they will suffer on."<sup>31</sup> Several months later—in mid-July of 1877—with the nation prostrate in the fourth year of a deep depression, with an army of fifteen million unemployed men drifting across the United States, with the wages of those lucky enough to work plummeting while a multitude stood willing to do their jobs for even less, a great social explosion shook the nation as it had never been shaken before in its century of existence. This was the railroad strike of 1877. While the Workingmen's Party of the United States did not instigate the strike, its sections did become deeply involved in the titanic struggle, and in several communities they assumed leadership of it.



THE WPUS AND THE GREAT LABOR UPRISING  
OF 1877

In the hot mid-July of 1877, exactly one year after the celebration of the one hundredth birthday of the United States, with the nation prostrate after three and one-half years of severe depression, a general railroad strike developed into a national conflagration that brought the country closer to a social revolution than at any other time in its century of existence.<sup>1</sup>

No one industry so typified the domination of the nation by corporate interests as did the railroads. Fattened on government land grants and monopoly routes, they gathered whole communities under their economic control, allowing them to flourish or wiping them out at whim. They were the vehicles on which many of the Gilded Age's notorious captains of industry had ridden to prominence through rate discriminations against individuals, firms, and whole communities, and through stock manipulation, bribery, and corruption. In the process, they had alienated labor, farmer, and small businessman alike. It is no wonder, then, that when the first concerted nationwide effort of a large group of workingmen to obtain justice occurred, it took place on the railroad system.

The panic of 1873, which was the beginning of a depression that lasted until 1878, had hit the railroad workers very hard. Their wages had been cut steadily to a level of five to ten dollars a week. Irregular employment caused a further reduction in their wages. Men with families were only permitted to work three or four days a week, and most of that time had to be spent away from their homes at their own expense. After paying a dollar a day to the company's hotel, they frequently returned home with as little as thirty-five or forty cents. To make matters even worse, the men often had to wait two, three, and even four months for wages that were supposed to be paid monthly.

The railroad managers had used the depression not only to reduce wages, but also to destroy the weak unions attempting to organize the

railroad workers. The companies refused to tolerate even the docile and fraternal organizations of railroad workmen—the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen. Union men were blacklisted, grievance committees were refused hearings, and the Pinkerton spies were so active that workers were actually afraid to talk to each other.<sup>2</sup>

The depression hit its depths in 1877. In that year, the railroads ordered a ten percent reduction in wages. This was the second such cut, the first having been put into effect in 1873. In addition, the Pennsylvania Railroad had ordered that freight trains be made up of thirty-four cars, instead of seventeen. The introduction of these "double headers" was designed to economize and reduce labor costs. It resulted in throwing a large group of conductors and brakemen out of work.

While a number of railroads paid no dividends to their stockholders during the crisis, many companies continued to pay dividends throughout the depression. The New York Central paid eight percent in cash dividends in 1873 and 1874, and ten percent in 1875, while the Pennsylvania and Baltimore & Ohio paid ten percent every year from 1873 to 1876. These and other railroad companies did not hesitate to pass the burden of their financial losses on to their employees, instead of to their stockholders. Between 1873 and 1877, railroad workers suffered reductions in their wages averaging between 21 and 37 percent, while food prices dropped only five percent. John Garrett, president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, lowered the wages of his men by fifty percent, yet not once did he either lower or fail to make a dividend payment.

On Tuesday, July 16, 1877, railroad workers at Martinsburg, West Virginia, went out on strike against still another wage cut imposed by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. As the militia was called out and violence erupted, the strike extended up the B & O line and spread rapidly to other lines. Other workers came to the support of the railroad strikers, and by the weekend, angry crowds of workers were attacking the railroads and fighting with militiamen in the cities of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The local militia generally sided with the strikers, and, for the first time since Andrew Jackson's administration, federal troops were called in to suppress a strike.<sup>3</sup>

Almost before the public was aware of what was happening, the contagion had spread as far as Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, and then on to San Francisco. Within a few days, one hundred thousand men were on strike in the first nationwide labor upheaval in history. All the main railway lines were affected, and even the employees of some Canadian roads joined the strike. Headlines blared out: "The Movement



Rapidly Extending In All Directions," and "The People Excited And Agitated From Ocean To Ocean."

While the strikers were for the most part men, women were also deeply involved. A reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* wrote in his account of the strike on the Baltimore & Ohio:

The singular part of the disturbances is the very active part taken by women, who are the wives and mothers of the firemen. They look famished and wild, and declare for starvation rather than have their people work for the reduced wages. Better to starve outright, they say, than to die by slow starvation.<sup>4</sup>

It was in Pittsburgh that the strike reached its most violent form. There, in response to the most recent wage cut, a secret organization called the Trainmen's Union sprang up, uniting all railroad workers into one union. Soon it spread along the various lines radiating from the city. A general strike called for June 27 never came about because of internal bickering, but the discontent remained, awaiting only a spark to trigger the explosion. The news of the events on the Baltimore & Ohio provided that spark. On July 19, the workers walked out and took control of the switches. By the following day, more than nine hundred loaded cars stood idle. The strike was completely effective, and although large crowds of unemployed men and curious onlookers roamed the streets, order prevailed.

The company refused to bargain with the men, and, sensing that the majority of the people of Pittsburgh supported the strikers, it began to maneuver for outside help to suppress the walkout. Governor John F. Hantrant was on a junket in far-off Wyoming Territory, at railroad expense, but he had given his adjutant general explicit instructions that if any disturbance occurred during his absence, he was to assume the powers ordinarily vested in the office of the state's chief executive. At the company's request (although signed by Sheriff Fife, the telegram was actually written by John Scott, the general solicitor of the Pennsylvania), Adjutant General James W. Latta ordered Pittsburgh's Sixth Militia Division to duty. But fearing that the majority of these militiamen, who were themselves workers, sympathized with the strikers, Latta ordered the Philadelphia militia to Pittsburgh.

The militiamen were not the only ones to sympathize with the strikers. A Pennsylvania legislative committee investigating the strike noted that:

laborers in the different mills, manufacturies, mines and other industries in Pittsburgh and the vicinity, were also strongly in sympathy with the railroad workers, considering the cause of the railroad men as their cause, as their wages had also been

reduced for the same causes. . . . They were not only willing but anxious to make a common fight against the corporations.

But this did not disturb the Pennsylvania Railroad. The company was beside itself with joy at the news that the Philadelphia militia was being sent to Pittsburgh. Colonel Tom Scott, the railroad president, boasted publicly that he would settle "this business with Philadelphia troops." He was confident that the militiamen, fresh from the influence of the banking and mercantile center, would not fraternize with the "mob." En route to Pittsburgh, the militiamen predicted that they were going to clean up the city. Even the *Army Journal* admitted that the Philadelphians were "spoiling for a fight."

When the Philadelphia troops arrived on July 21, a crowd of men, women, and children harassed their line of march, and a few boys let loose a volley of stones at the soldiers. The command, "Fire!" rang out, and immediately the troops began firing directly into the crowd. The panic-stricken throng, trapped and unarmed, surged in all directions, and several fell. The reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post* wrote:

Women and children rushed frantically about, some seeking safety, others calling for friends and relatives. Strong men halted with fear, and trembling with excitement, rushed madly to and fro, trampling upon the killed and wounded as well as upon those who had dropped to mother earth to escape injury and death.

Within a few minutes, at least twenty were dead and twenty-nine maimed or wounded by the Philadelphia militiamen. The dead included a woman and three small children.

As the word of the massacre spread through the city, the angry crowds grew in size, forcing the Philadelphia soldiers to retreat to the roundhouse. There, a siege began which culminated when the crowd put the building to the torch, forcing the troops to fight their way out. In the ensuing skirmish, some twenty more Pittsburghers, along with two or three of the soldiers, were killed.

As the battle raged, fires broke out on the railroad property and burned out of control until they had destroyed some five million dollars worth of property. By July 25, although the strike continued, order had been restored by organized patrols of strikers and citizen volunteers. In spite of all the destruction, community sympathy remained on the side of the strikers, and a grand jury investigation of firing on the people by the Philadelphia militia termed the action "an unauthorized willful, and wanton killing . . . which the inquest can call by no other name but murder."

The same report could have been produced in the case of every one



of the more than one hundred strikers killed during the upheaval. In Reading, Pennsylvania, a militia company, following tactically absurd orders from the railroad management, fired into a huge crowd of citizens, killing ten and wounding forty more.

Although the Great Strike was spontaneous and unorganized—it had nothing in the nature of central leadership and direction—this first nationwide rebellion of labor frightened the authorities and the upper classes as nothing before in the nation's history. On July 24, John Hay, soon to become Assistant Secretary of State, wrote to his wealthy father-in-law in alarm: "Any hour the mob chooses it can destroy any city in the country—that is the simple truth."<sup>5</sup>

The Great Strike of 1877 occurred six years after the Paris Commune—the working-class-led revolution which took power in that city on March 18, 1871, and, for the seventy-two days of its existence, established a new type of state. The news of the "Revolution of March 18" produced a wave of fear throughout the established circles in both Europe and the United States. It soon became the practice to blame the social tensions in the United States on foreign influence, and this technique was employed with increasing frequency during the economic crisis of the 1870s. But it was in the Great Strike of 1877 that a large portion of the press came to view the outbreaks as the "long-matured concerted assertion of Communism throughout the United States."

From the very outset of the strike in Martinsburg, the fear was voiced that if the "great mobs" succeeded in imposing their terms on the railroads by violence, "communism would be established in America." Thus, as early as July 19, the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* was warning that the strike was endangering U.S. society, and that it had to be dealt with as if it were an "insurrection," and not just a "labor dispute":

It is not pleasant to think of men being mowed down by soldiers, but it will be a much worse spectacle for the country to have a mob triumphant in a state like West Virginia than to have the life blown out of men who refuse to recognize the right of every American to control his own labor and his own property. This is the nearest approach we have yet had to communism in America, and if we are to be saved from the darker horrors of that system, our authorities must act with unmistakable vigor in the present emergency.<sup>6</sup>

The Pittsburgh massacres were viewed by the labor press as a prime example of corporate and military brutality. But in the commercial press, they triggered a veritable barrage of editorials blaming the events of July 22 and 23 entirely on the communists. Some newspapers bluntly accused the Pittsburgh strikers of being communists (a fact

which, according to the New York *Tribune*, "does not need demonstration") and reprinted the editorial in the Pittsburgh *Leader*, which concluded that "the workingman in Pittsburgh is really a communist, and there is no doubt that communistic ideas have widely spread." Most papers, however, insisted that it was not the strikers themselves who were responsible for the violence in Pittsburgh and other railroad centers, but rather a group of men who were neither railroad strikers nor their sympathizers. They were the "destructionists," who had been unleashed by a powerful, secret oath-bound central organization headed by men who saw in the Great Strike a "golden opportunity to establish the Commune in the United States":

Secret meetings of the Communists were held at which committees and sub-committees were appointed. . . . Each committee was instructed to gather from the byways and dens and the hovels these misers to follow the direction of these blind leaders of the blind.

The labor upheaval of 1877, therefore, was "a concentrated scheme on the part of these non-working agitators" to precipitate in the United States "a reign of disorder and pillage under cover of the railroad strike," which would "end in a Communist America."<sup>7</sup>

The "arch-conspirators" were sometimes referred to as the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Knights of Labor ("probably an amalgamation of the Molly Maguires and the Commune," said one observer), and more often as the "Internationalists" (the former members of the U.S. sections of the International Workingmen's Association, the First International). But most often, the responsibility for the spread of the strike and the violence that accompanied it was placed at the doorstep of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. According to newspaper accounts, there were party sections everywhere, and when the workers walked out, they turned to these sections for leadership: "It was said that this organization had not only money, but men with which to help the cause along." Through its sixty thousand members (the figure most commonly used), the "Communist leaders" of the Workingmen's Party took control of the uprisings, albeit behind the scenes:

They do not appear at mass-meetings to roll out their frenzied rhetoric. . . . From the seclusion of the Star Chamber they issue their orders. . . . Like Robespierre and his brace of Fellow Conspirators, they sit in darkness and plot against the life of the nation. . . .

This body, the Workingmen's Party of the United States, has manipulated this labor revolution throughout the country since



its inception. Every trades-union and labor organization is infected with members of the American Commune.<sup>8</sup>

Writing in the fourth volume of his *History of the United States Since the Civil War*, Ellis Paxton Oberholtzer echoes the contemporary press in attributing the railroad strikes of 1877 to the communists. He maintains that "a veritable reign of terror" was conducted throughout various parts of the country during the strike. According to Oberholtzer, this terror was being instigated by none other than the "International Association of Workingmen" which "brought forward its various agents and exhibited its power. Never before had its hand been so clearly seen."<sup>9</sup>

Apparently Oberholtzer was unaware of the fact that the International Workingmen's Association had been dissolved a year before the strikes, and he obviously meant the living descendant of the International—the Workingmen's Party of the United States. However, in his own book on the strikes, Robert V. Bruce demonstrates that the party had little to do with the upheaval before it occurred. After studying the manuscript minutes of the Workingmen's Party's Hoboken and Philadelphia sections, he concludes that "the members . . . showed not the slightest advance knowledge of the great labor uprising."<sup>10</sup> A study of the *Labor Standard* supports this interpretation. J.P. McDonnell, editor of the party's leading English-language organ, denied that the strike was organized by its members: "It spread because the workmen of Pittsburgh felt the same oppression that was felt by the workmen of West Virginia and so with the workmen of Chicago and St. Louis." The *Labor Standard* also denounced charges of communist complicity in the riots as "base and wicked inventions." In fact, it noted, wherever members of the Workingmen's Party exercised influence, they worked to prevent violence. The same could not be said for the Philadelphia militia and the United States Army!

The truth is that as a result of the disruptive work of the Lassalleans in preventing trade-union work, the newly organized Workingmen's Party had had little contact with railroad workers prior to the strike. In the summer of 1876, the Cincinnati section had adopted resolutions condemning the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad, whose workers were on strike, for its labor policies, and had urged revocation of its charter. The section had forwarded the resolutions to the strikers, but after the Lassalleans took control, it became so involved in political campaigning that it failed to follow up these contacts. When the strike started, only one member of the party appears to have had close contacts with the railroad workers—Harry Eastman, a machinist in East St. Louis.<sup>12</sup>

On Saturday, July 22, 1877, the Chicago-based National Executive Committee of the Workingmen's Party of the United States met and decided to issue an appeal calling upon all workingmen to assist the strikers "in the warfare which they are now waging in defense of justice and equal rights." A sub-committee was appointed to draft the appeal. Meanwhile, a telegram was sent to P.M. Arthur, head of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, pledging the assistance of the WPUS to his union. That same afternoon, the NEC issued a communiqué to all sections supporting the strikers. It opened:

COMRADES — In the desperate struggle for existence now being maintained by the workingmen of the great railroads through the land we expect that every member will render all possible moral and substantial assistance to our brethren in misfortune, and support all reasonable measures which may be found necessary by them.

The communiqué then advanced demands for the eight-hour work-day and for the nationalization of the railroads and telegraph lines, "as is now done in all of the most advanced countries in Europe, thus destroying the greatest and most powerful monopolies of modern times."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, a week after the strike had gotten under way, the National Executive Committee was plainly seeking to provide organizational leadership and a program for the developing strike movement. But after issuing the first communiqué, it was unable to give cohesion to the strikes in a score of local communities. Members of the NEC became preoccupied with events in Chicago. Consequently, the Party in each city was left on its own, and its role in the Great Strike varied from city to city. One thing, however, was uniform: in no city did the Workingmen's Party of the United States advocate armed insurrection, and everywhere, its influence on the 1877 strikes was a moderating one.

In some cities, the party exercised no influence at all. With less than 4,500 members, many of whom could hardly speak English,<sup>14</sup> and with sections in only certain urban centers, the party played no role whatsoever in the strikes in Martinsburg and other parts of West Virginia; in Baltimore and other areas of Maryland; in Hornellsville and Buffalo, New York; or in Terre Haute and Indianapolis, Indiana. Even in Pittsburgh, where editorials and articles alike were charging that the fiery events of July 22 and 23 were the result of the party's work, the WPUS appears to have exercised no influence. Not a single Pittsburgh paper mentioned the presence of any member of the party among the strikers or "the mob" in general. A study of the more than



one thousand pages of the *Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Railroad Riots in July 1877*—the Pennsylvania legislature's inquiry into the Great Strike in the Commonwealth—does not reveal a single reference to the influence of the Workingmen's Party in the strikes in Pittsburgh, Reading, Harrisburg, Allegheny City, Allentown, Scranton, or the other Pennsylvania centers. It is significant, too, that in his survey of the origins and development of the Great Strike, J.P. McDonnell, editor of the party's leading English-language organ, *Labor Standard*, not only denied that the labor uprising in any railroad center was organized by its members, but did not list a single party meeting that supported the strikers in West Virginia, Maryland, Indiana, Hornellsville, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, Pittsburgh, Reading, or Scranton.<sup>15</sup>

In San Francisco, the party's sections' efforts to respond to the labor uprising became intertwined with the anti-Chinese movement developing in that city. A month before the railroad strike, the *Labor Standard* had pleaded "Don't Kill the Coolie," and urged: "Organize and agitate for the abolition of the coolie system and when that is achieved, agitate for the abolition of the capitalist. The coolie is a slave, the wage laborer is a slave, and the capitalist is in both cases a slave-holder. Organize, organize, organize; but *don't kill the coolie!*" The WPUS in California approved this approach to the Chinese issue.<sup>16</sup>

On July 22, 1877, the two San Francisco sections met to decide on an appropriate response to the rail strike. They called for a mass meeting on the following day in the sandlots near city hall, "To Sympathize with the Strikers in the East." On July 23, close to 8,000 people gathered to hear such WPUS speakers as James D'Arcy, D.J.H. Swain, and Laura Hendricks denounce the railroad companies, call for the eight-hour day and public works for the unemployed, and for the nationalization of industry. There were so many in the audience that two speakers' stands had to be set up some distance apart. A band was present to provide entertainment. Despite the presence of some hecklers, the rally proceeded peacefully and successfully. Some agitators in the crowd began to call for militant action against the Chinese, but D'Arcy explained that "this was a discussion of the broad question of labor and capital, not an anticoolie rally."

At the conclusion of the rally, however, an anticoolie club drew hundreds of young men into attacks on Chinese wash houses. For two days, mobs attacked Chinese homes and business establishments associated with Chinese labor. A considerable number of fires were set, and there were pitched battles between the forces of law and order and the anticoolie vigilantes.

The two local sections of the WPUS cancelled any future meetings and issued circulars reading: "Citizens and Comrades: Our cause lives through law, order and good government."<sup>17</sup> The *Labor Standard* commented briefly on these events: "From San Francisco it has been reported that the Chinese quarter has been threatened. We hope our friends will direct their struggles against the ruling class, *not against* their victims, the Chinese."<sup>18</sup>

But the "friends" in the WPUS of San Francisco were swept aside by the anti-Chinese elements and were pushed into oblivion by the newly formed Workingmen's Party of California, led by Denis Kearney, which combined some radical prolabor rhetoric with the most intense anti-Chinese racism.<sup>19</sup>

In Boston, Paterson, and Newark, the WPUS sections held one rally of sympathy with the strikers, opposed lawlessness, and condemned the use of "military power." Before adjourning, the Boston meeting also endorsed the program outlined in the NEC's communiqué: the eight-hour day and nationalization of the railroads. The sections in Philadelphia called several meetings, but each was banned by the police. After a battle between strikers and the regular troops, the sections again tried to hold a meeting, and this time they took the precaution of presenting the mayor with the resolutions to be presented at the meeting, which upheld the strikers but objected strenuously to "wanton destruction of property," and promised to use only "honorable and lawful" means in support of the strike. However, once again the meeting was banned. A committee was dispatched to the mayor to demand that he uphold the right of peaceable assembly. The mayor responded that there would be no meetings permitted "for the present." At this, the Philadelphia sections of the WPUS gave up, and announced that they would concentrate on organizing workers into trade unions.<sup>20</sup>

In New York, over a thousand sailors and marines stood ready in addition to the militia and police. Still, the Workingmen's Party was able to hold a demonstration in support of the striking railroad workers at Tompkins Square, scene of the bloody suppression of an unemployed meeting during the winter of 1874. Interestingly enough, the chief speaker at the July, 1877, rally was John Swinton, who had led the protests against brutality in 1874. In his brief address to the rally, Swinton referred to the railway strike as "the most impressive incident in the history of American industry," and predicted that workingmen, generally, would eventually "succeed" in the struggle between capital and labor. He also stressed the fact that the workers were not intent on a violent solution. Their objective, he said, was "not destruction,



or incendiarism or riot," but rather "the establishment of a fundamental, intrinsic, and inalienable right of the workingmen." While Swinton did not say whether the eventual triumph would come by way of trade unionism or politics, he did lean toward the party declaration read at the rally which proclaimed that "nothing short of a political revolution, through the ballot box [would] remedy the evils" suffered by the workers.

The police waited impatiently while the progressive editor of the New York *Sun* addressed the crowd, and then, as the audience was dispersing, they charged and clubbed workers on their way out of the square without the slightest provocation.<sup>21</sup> With this meeting, the activity of the New York sections of the Workingmen's Party ended for the duration of the strike.

In Louisville, Kentucky, the English and German sections jointly sponsored a huge mass meeting on July 24, where a committee was appointed to canvass every ward of the city and raise funds for the benefit of the strikers. Resolutions were adopted expressing "deep regret of the recent vast destruction of property at Pittsburgh, Pa.," but proclaiming the "necessity for workingmen all over this land taking a positive and emphatic stand for the rights of the laboring class of mankind." While fully supporting the striking railroad workers and urging a "restoration of the ten percent, recently cut off their pay," the Workingmen's Party of Louisville expressed itself as "unfavorable to strikes," and, believing "the ballot-box is the medium between us and capital," cordially invited "all workingmen to join in with the workingmen's party of the United States":

Let us present one unbroken front, we with our ballots and the capitalists with their dollars, and if we are true to ourselves victory will perch upon our banners.

The Louisville *Courier-Journal* reported with some surprise: "The meeting was very quiet and orderly, and the feeling, though earnest and decided, was not in the least violent or incendiary."<sup>22</sup>

On the afternoon of July 22, the Workingmen's Party of Cincinnati held an open-air meeting at the Court Street market place. Represented in the crowd of three to four thousand were the German, Bohemian, and English-speaking sections, the first accompanied by the Eureka Band and carrying "the blood-red flag of the Commune." Four speaking stands were set up, two for English-speaking party members and two for German. The key speech of the afternoon was delivered by Peter H. Clark. The Black educator condemned the railroad companies and their political allies, denounced the slaughter of workers by federal troops and state militia, and analyzed at length the causes of the economic crisis and its impact on the working class. "I

sympathize in this struggle with the strikers," he declared, "and I feel sure that in this I have the cooperation of nine-tenths of my fellow citizens." But sympathy, he said, was not enough. It was necessary to create a society in which the widespread suffering that provoked the strike would be eliminated. "Every railroad in the land should be owned or controlled by the government. The title of private owners should be extinguished, and the ownership vested in the people." And this was only the beginning. Machinery—indeed all the means of production—had to be appropriated and used for the benefit of the people, and not for private gain. There was only one "remedy for the evils of society"—socialism. "Choose ye this day which course ye shall pursue," Clark concluded, to thunderous applause. The *Cincinnati Commercial*, which published Clark's speech in full under the heading, "Socialism: The Remedy for the Evils of Society," reported that he was "well received." The *Emancipator* found his speech "characterized by that deep pathos of feeling that is to be expected of one who can look back at the time when the wrong and injustice of capital abused his race, which by its labors and sorrows helped to build the greatness of this nation."<sup>23</sup> Clark's speech to the railroad strikers was probably the first widely publicized proposal for socialism by a Black American.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the Great Strike, the Workingmen's Party of Cincinnati was reported to be meeting constantly to consider steps for supporting the strikers and spreading the walkout, and its members were said to be "active among the men in the yards." But the strike was quickly suppressed in Cincinnati, and the party's influence there was quite limited.<sup>25</sup>

The railroad strikes served as a fuse, carrying the spark of rebellion to other workingmen, who, if they were working, were suffering from wage cuts, as well as to the unemployed multitudes in the great cities. In several cities, the original strike on the railroads expanded to many other industries, and nowhere was this more clearly evident than in Chicago and St. Louis. In both cities, the Workingmen's Party of the United States assumed the leadership of the great upheavals.

The party had helped to arouse the workers of Chicago. Two days before the strike started on the Michigan Central, the party had held an emergency conference after which it issued a call for a mass meeting to be held the following day. About 20,000 workers answered the call, many of them marching to the demonstration with banners on which were written: "We Want Work Not Charity," "Why Does Overproduction Cause Starvation?" and "Life by Work or Death by Fight."<sup>26</sup>

George Schilling and Albert R. Parsons were among the leaders of the Workingmen's Party to address the meeting. Parsons, the



"moving spirit" of the socialists, urged support for the railroad workers who were on strike in the eastern states, but said nothing about the strike in Chicago,<sup>27</sup> nor is there any evidence that the party had anything to do with the walkout of the switchmen of the Michigan Central. This was followed by a stoppage at the railroad's shops and freight yards, and by walkouts of workers at the freight yards of the Baltimore & Ohio and the Illinois Central.

The railroad strikes triggered similar actions by working people across the city. Lumberhovers, saw and planing mill men, iron workers, brass finishers, carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, furniture makers, polishers, shoemakers, tailors, painters, glaziers, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, the press reported, all went on strike. By mid-afternoon of July 24, most work in Chicago had come to a halt. Dispatches from the city to the nation's press bore the headlines: "The Strike General in Chicago."<sup>28</sup>

It was this strike impulse that the socialists sought to lead and to broaden. But they insisted that the great movement must remain peaceful and must not under any circumstances resort to violence. Indeed, the *Chicago Tribune* emphasized that at meetings of the strikers and their representatives, all who were associated with the Workingmen's Party, "contrary to general expectation, counseled (at least openly) moderation, and deprecated any resort to violence."<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the identical *Chicago Tribune* (and other Chicago papers) began to accuse the socialists of fomenting crowd violence, and the police began harassing leaders of the Workingmen's Party and breaking up meetings. Within a few days, Parsons and Schilling of the National Committee, and Philip Van Patten, its national secretary, were arrested in connection with the strike. After Parsons had been fired as a printer on the *Times* and blacklisted throughout the city, he was taken by the police to City Hall, charged with being responsible for the strike, and threatened with lynching by the Superintendent of Police and several members of the Board of Trade. Parsons never forgot the cries of "Hang him," "Lynch him," "Lock him up," from the infuriated members of the Board of Trade. That same evening, the WPUS gathering of 5,000 workers was broken up by a wedge of police, firing blank cartridges and swinging clubs.<sup>30</sup>

As the work stoppages spread and began to assume the character of a tremendous uprising, the Workingmen's Party made every effort to avoid violence. Van Patten, when he was called to the Central Police Station to be given the "Parsons treatment," disavowed any connection with "mob violence," and reaffirmed the socialists' desire for peace. On the afternoon of July 25, the party issued the following proclamation:

#### WORKINGMEN OF CHICAGO!

The success of our honest effort to increase wages depends entirely upon your good conduct and peaceful though firm behavior. We hereby declare that any riotous action in our meetings will be immediately put down by us.

The grand principles of Humanity and Popular Sovereignty need no violence to sustain them. For the sake of the Cause which we hold most dear, let every honest workingman

#### HELP US TO PRESERVE ORDER.

Let us show the world that with all our grievances and misery we can still act like men and good citizens.

The committee

Workingmen's Party of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

As the socialists tried to channel the uprising into a disciplined, city-wide strike, private militia companies, veterans' organizations, newly formed citizens' cavalry companies, ward patrons, and special police were organized to support the local police, the state militia, and the United States Army. Over 20,000 men were under arms, with six companies of the Ninth Infantry now en route from Rock Island. They were being urged by the Chicago press to destroy the emerging "Commune" organized by the Workingmen's Party. "Squelch them out, stamp them out, sweep them out with grapeshot," shrieked the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* in an editorial.<sup>32</sup>

The advice was taken to heart. On July 26, a pitched battle between police and strikers took place at the Halsey Street viaduct, which ended with twelve strikers dead and several score wounded. Chicago had become a second Pittsburgh. Parades of strikers were broken up by police, "citizens patrols," and federal troops, armed with repeating rifles. Members of the Workingmen's Party were arrested, the party's headquarters were demolished, and all efforts of the party to maintain its leadership of the strike movement and channel it in a peaceful, organized direction were nullified by the police brutality and harassment. Gradually, the strike in Chicago was crushed, and on July 28, freight trains moved under military guard. Between thirty and fifty workers had been killed, and almost one hundred wounded before the strike ended in the Windy City.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, events in St. Louis were moving so quickly that the *Missouri Republican*, the city's leading newspaper, exclaimed: "It is wrong to call this a strike; it is a labor revolution."<sup>34</sup> On July 21, the strike reached East St. Louis, and that evening, the railroad workers held an open-air meeting which was attended by delegations from the Workingmen's Party of St. Louis, across the river. Before the



meeting ended, the railroad workers voted for a strike, set up a committee of one man from each railroad, and occupied the Relay Depot as their headquarters. The committee immediately posted General Order No. 1, forbidding freight trains from leaving any yard until the companies rescinded the ten percent wage cut and redressed other grievances of the workers.<sup>35</sup>

On the evening of July 24, a mass meeting was held in St. Louis under the auspices of the Workingmen's Party of the United States—the third such meeting since the strike had begun in East St. Louis.<sup>36</sup> At least ten thousand attended, including about fifteen hundred molders and mechanics, who marched four abreast, headed by a single torch and fife and drum, with some of the marchers armed with lathes and clubs. The climax of the mass meeting came when Henry Allen, in the name of the Workingmen's Party Executive Committee, introduced a series of resolutions which opened by cautioning against violence, then asserted that “every man willing to perform a use to society” was “entitled to a living,” and that if the “present system of production and distribution fails to provide for our wants, it then becomes the duty of the government to enact such laws as will insure equal justice to all the peoples of the nation.” The resolutions closed with the recommendation by the Executive Committee for

a general strike of all branches of industry, for eight hours as a day's work, and we call on the legislature for the immediate enactment of an eight hour law and the enforcement and severe penalty for its violation, and that the employment of all children under fourteen years of age be prohibited.<sup>37</sup>

The resolutions were quickly adopted and were printed in the form of a “Proclamation” in both English and German, which was distributed throughout the city the following day.<sup>38</sup> Along with the “Proclamation,” circulars were distributed calling upon laboring men to assemble at Lucas Market that afternoon—July 25—for a grand parade “to demonstrate their strength and to induce all who were still in the ranks of non-strikers to lend their assistance for the common interest.” While the procession was being prepared, the general strike was getting under way. The employees of a beef cannery announced on a banner that they were on strike for an increase of wages from seventy-five cents to \$1.75 per day—thereby earning for themselves the description by the *Missouri Republican* of “Mad Strikers.”<sup>39</sup> A reporter telegraphed an eastern paper:

Great crowds of strikers and some 300 Negro laborers on the levee visited a large number of manufacturing establishments in the southern part of the city, compelling all employees to stop work,

putting out all fires in the engine rooms and closing the building. . . . The colored part of the crowd marched up the levee and forced all steamboat companies and officers of independent steamers to sign pledges to increase the wages of all classes of steamboat and levee laborers sixty to one hundred percent.

The reporter failed to mention that in their march along the levee, the steamboat men and roustabouts were led by a fife-and-drum band and a man waving a U.S. flag.<sup>40</sup>

After they had obtained promises of higher pay, these workers “of all colors” headed triumphantly for Lucas Market to join the great procession. The march got under way at two o'clock in the afternoon. Four abreast and stretching for nearly four blocks, the workers moved along. Six hundred factory workers marched up behind a brass band and carried a huge transparency with the words: “NO MONOPOLY — WORKINGMEN'S RIGHTS.” A company of railroad strikers came with coupling pins, brake rods, red signal flags, and other “irons and implements emblematic of their calling.” The only red flags in the parade were those carried by the railroaders as emblems of their trade, but someone ran into a bakery, came out with a loaf of bread, stuck it on a flagstaff and bore it aloft to the cheers of the crowd. “That is what we are fighting for,” cried one of the marchers, and another added: “Let it be the symbol of the strike.”

The procession, headed by the English, German, and Bohemian sections of the Workingmen's Party, marched through the streets. Strikers' committees went out ahead to call out those still working, and as the march came by, workers in foundries, bagging companies, flour mills; bakers, chemical, zinc, and white lead workers—all poured out of the shops and into the crowd. By the time the procession reached Lucas Market and disbanded, over five thousand were in the line of march.

In Carondelet, far on the south side of the city, a similar march developed as a crowd of iron workers closed down the zinc works, the steel works, and other plants. There, the railroad strikers also carried red signal flags, but the red flags “of the Internationals” also appeared as members of the Workingmen's Party held aloft their banners. A reporter for the *Times* conceded that the red flags of the “Internationals” were “always greeted with a round of cheers.” In East St. Louis, there was a parade of women in support of the strike.

The grand climax of the exciting day came that evening at a mass meeting at Lucas Market, where an estimated ten thousand people assembled for another WPUS gathering. Peter A. Lofgren opened the meeting, the largest of its kind during the strike, with the announcement that the general strike must go on not only until the eight-hour



day triumphed, but until the workers got control of the government and cleaned it out. This could only be accomplished if the workingmen sent to Washington as their representatives men of their own class, instead of the "kid glove" lawyers who had so misrepresented them during the last decade. But to achieve this goal, labor must unite behind the Workingmen's Party. Then, just as Lincoln had freed the four million slaves, the nine million white slaves would be emancipated. Finally, in a reference to the defense of the railroad companies' wage-cutting policies, he said that if the railroads could not pay the interest on their bonds, let alone meet their expenses, the managers should resign and put the roads into the hands of the people.

Another party speaker stressed that the movement was "not a strike but a social revolution": "The people are rising up in their might and declaring that they will not longer submit to being oppressed by unproductive capital." Said another party spokesman, "This great movement is rapidly increasing in intensity and is now so strong that no state, and not even the United States Government can peaceably put a stop to it." He demanded that Congress pass an effective eight-hour law, recall the charters of all national banks, institute a public works program to relieve unemployment, and purchase all railroads with an issue of greenbacks. "I propose," he concluded, "that we make an appeal directly to the President of the United States."

The meeting closed with the adoption of "a platform and plan of action" submitted by the Executive Committee. Printed later under the title of "Vox Populi Vox Dei," the manifesto noted that "the entire labor movement of the USA" was "in a condition of revolution," and that the managers of the railroads had "confessed their inability to make expenses." In view of this, the manifesto demanded that the government "take possession of all the railroads and run them for the general welfare." Three other demands were advanced: for the "recall of all charters of all national banks, together with their whole currency," for a program of public works, and for an eight-hour law. If these demands were granted, the workingmen would pledge that they would "everywhere uphold the government of the people thus established in justice and equity."<sup>41</sup>

That night, the Executive Committee ruled the city. Nearly all the manufacturing establishments in St. Louis had been closed. Sixty factories were shut down, not including the "mercantile firms from Fifth Street to the river . . . which closed down for prudential reasons." "Business is fairly paralyzed here," said the *Daily Market Reporter*. Such economic activities as continued did so only with the permission of the Executive Committee. The British Consul in St. Louis noted how the railroad strikers had "taken the road into their own hands,

running the trains and collecting fares," and added that "it is to be deplored that a large portion of the general public appear to regard such conduct as a legitimate mode of warfare."<sup>42</sup>

To provide bread, a flour mill was permitted to remain open. When the owner of the Belcher Sugar Refinery applied to the Executive Committee for permission to operate his plant for forty-eight hours, lest a large quantity of sugar spoil, the Executive Committee persuaded the refinery workers to go back and work and sent a guard of 200 men to protect the refinery. David T. Burbank points out that "the Belcher episode revealed . . . the spectacle of the owner of one of the city's largest industrial enterprises recognizing the *de facto* authority of the Executive Committee." Small wonder that some historians later described the situation as "the St. Louis 'Soviet,'" and that the "'Soviet' . . . seems to have taken over most of the functions of government in the city." The contemporary press, however, preferred the title, "St. Louis Commune," and while the St. Louis papers used that term in horror, they took a certain pride in the claim that it was the "only *genuine* Commune" established during the great strikes of 1877.<sup>43</sup>

But reports of a mighty Executive Committee representing at least 22,000 workingmen and carrying through a "real revolution" unhesitatingly and unswervingly, until crushed by overwhelming police and military force were hardly accurate. In truth, having shattered the authority of the city and temporarily paralyzed the wealthy classes, the Executive Committee vacillated, hesitated, and fell back, unsure of what to do next. At the same time, it revealed that it feared the very mass movement it had helped to create. The Committee was actually a mass of contradictions. In a handbill issued on July 25, it raised the threat of mob violence, and at the same time repudiated it. The handbill expressed the workingmen's desire to gain their demands "without spilling one drop of blood"; yet it demanded "justice . . . or death!" Again: "We shall do all in our power to keep down the mob, but fear we can no longer restrain the starving millions of our once happy land." A further contradiction was in the declaration: "We are united in purpose," but "are undecided what course to pursue."<sup>44</sup>

The next day, July 26, the Executive Committee issued a proclamation to employers, through the mayor of St. Louis, suggesting that they feed the strikers, and hinting that in this way they could "avoid plunder, arson or violence by persons made desperate by destitution. . . ." The proclamation assured the mayor of the Executive Committee's desire to assist "in maintaining order and protecting property," and concluded with the revealing statement:



Further, in order to avoid riot, we have determined to have no large processions until our organization is so complete as to positively assure the citizens of St. Louis of a perfect maintenance of order and full protection of property.<sup>45</sup>

Yet the mass meetings were the main source of the Committee's strength, and the decision to hold no further meetings practically guaranteed that the great upheaval would disintegrate. There were no strong trade unions left in St. Louis, so that it was only through the mass meetings that the Executive Committee could maintain contact with the workers. Thus, the Committee's decision to hold no further mass meetings was fatal.

It was motivated by a variety of reasons, especially the fear that assemblages might quickly get out of control as some speakers pressed for a more militant policy than that advocated by the Executive Committee. When a speaker at a mass meeting on July 25 began talking of "commencing the work of organizing and arming" so as to be prepared for an armed attack against the strikers by the police and the federal troops, the Executive Committee tried to have the speaker arrested. He vanished, however, before the police could lay their hands on him.

Racism also played an important part in the Committee's decision. Since the end of slavery, neither the trade unions nor the socialist organizations of St. Louis had ever displayed any willingness to cooperate with Black workers, and during its year of existence, the Workingmen's Party of St. Louis had not made the slightest effort to recruit Blacks. Hence the New York *Sun*'s reporter was quite correct when he noted that the Negro participation with white workers in the general strike was "a novel feature of the times."<sup>46</sup>

But the "novel feature" soon disturbed both camps in the St. Louis struggle. Naturally, the establishment was shocked that Blacks were forgetting their assigned role of "contented banjo-strummers" and were beginning to assert their rights just as if they were white. In its description of the Negro strikers who paraded on the levee before joining the great procession, the *Missouri Republican* labelled them "a dangerous-looking set of men," and observed almost in terror that "there was something blood-curdling in the manner in which they shouldered their clubs and started up the levee whooping."<sup>47</sup> As Blacks began to appear in processions and at the mass meetings sponsored by the Workingmen's Party, the press—particularly the *Missouri Republican*—painted pictures of a movement that was being taken over by "notorious Negroes." It was all due, it charged, to the "insidious influence of the International," and the Workingmen's Party was accused of being responsible for these "outrages" against the social values of the community.<sup>48</sup>

This was enough for the white supremacists in the Workingmen's Party. After the strike, Albert Currin, a leader of the German section and a prominent member of the Executive Committee, was interviewed by the St. Louis *Times*. In the course of the interview, Currin emphasized that the Executive Committee had been shocked by the part the "niggers" had assumed in the parades and mass meetings, and that it tried to dissuade white workers "from going with the niggers."<sup>49</sup> (The use of the derogatory term is Currin's.) One sure way to keep Blacks out of mass meetings and white workers from going with Black workers was not to hold mass meetings at all.

But by abandoning mass meetings, the Executive Committee of the Workingmen's Party of the United States in St. Louis lost contact with the people it had organized and led. David T. Burbank puts it aptly:

At the very point in the strike when the Committee should have exercised the strictest control of its forces, and should have stated its objectives, policies and strategies in the clearest manner, it virtually abdicated.<sup>50</sup>

Having abandoned mass meetings, the Executive Committee was reduced to appealing to the authorities—appeals couched in the contradictory language of opposing mob violence while threatening that only the adoption of its demands would forestall it. It urged Governor Phelps to convene the legislature and speak out for the passage of an eight-hour law and for a measure prohibiting the employment of children under fourteen years of age. "Nothing short of compliance to the above just demand," the Committee declared, "will arrest the tidal wave of revolution."<sup>51</sup>

At an earlier stage in the general strike, this declaration might have produced some results; state and city authorities had practically left the Executive Committee in control of the city, and when the receivers of the St. Louis & South Eastern Railroad asked Mayor Overstolz to arrest the strikers, he refused because of his "inability to do so."<sup>52</sup> But by the time the Executive Committee pleaded with the governor, the authorities had decided that the general strike was in the process of disintegration, and that there were ways of arresting "the tidal wave of revolution" without making concessions to the Executive Committee.

On Friday, July 27, the Executive Committee issued a "Proclamation to the Citizens of St. Louis" assuring them that reports that the Committee favored "arming" the workers were "villainous falsehoods." As usual, "mob violence" was denounced, and the Committee declared itself ready to assist the city authorities in preventing "mobs" from parading through the streets. Businessmen were called upon to "further the passage of an eight-hour law."<sup>53</sup>



While the Executive Committee was denying the charge that it intended to arm the workers, St. Louis merchants had raised \$20,000 to arm a citizens' militia; the St. Louis Gun Club contributed shotguns, and 1,500 rifles arrived from the state arsenal, while small arms were shipped from the federal arsenal at Rock Island to arm citizens. Three companies of the United States Infantry came in from Kansas to buttress the St. Louis police and citizen militia. Thus, while the Executive Committee was issuing proclamations and handbills affirming its devotion to peaceful activities and its abhorrence of violence in any form, powerful forces were being mobilized to crush the strike.<sup>54</sup>

This was accomplished on Friday afternoon, July 27, when the headquarters of the Workingmen's Party were raided, strikers scattered and arrested by the police backed up by federal troops, and the members of the Executive Committee arrested and imprisoned. The General Strike in St. Louis was over, and in the next two days, federal troops broke the strike of the railroad workers across the river in East St. Louis.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of July, headlines in many newspapers throughout the country read: "THE REIGN OF THE COMMUNE DRAWING TO AN END." Although sporadic flareups continued well into August, the great uprising of 1877 was over by July 30—crushed by local police, state militia, and by three thousand federal troops who had been moved from city to city under the direction of the War Department. "The strikers have been put down by force. . . ." President Hayes wrote in his diary.<sup>56</sup>

The week after the strikes ended, most working people returned to work. Although they did so without wage increases, they did not return demoralized. The strikes, which were described in the WPUS journal *Labor Standard* as "The Second American Revolution," became the springboard for a new movement of workers all over the country. Even the commercial press recognized that things would never be the same again. In an editorial on "The Dangerous Classes," published a few days after the strikes were crushed, the *Chicago Tribune* argued that the upheaval had revealed that the U.S. social order was developing in a manner similar to those of European industrial societies:

We, too, have our crowded tenement houses, and our entire streets and neighborhoods occupied by paupers and thieves. . . . The extremes of wealth and poverty are now to be seen here as abroad; the rich growing richer and the poor poorer—a fact to tempt disorder.

And—most important of all—"We now have the Communists on our soil."<sup>57</sup>

Of course, they had been there long before, but to a large extent they had not been able to reach the workers in the United States. Speaking of the situation in the Workingmen's Party of the United States before the strikes of 1877, Robert Schilling wrote a decade later:

We called public meetings in all parts of the country, but the masses were slow to move. Oft-times, after posting bills and paying for advertising, we were also compelled to contribute our last nickel for hall rent and walk home instead of ride.<sup>58</sup>

To a marked degree, the "Great Upheaval" changed all this. "The industrial disturbances of 1877, the first great manifestation of industrial and social unrest in this country," wrote Thomas J. Morgan of the Chicago WPUS, "gave us the sympathetic ear of the discontented toiler."<sup>59</sup>

It seems unlikely that the WPUS had more than 4,500 members in July, 1877, and while during and following the Great Strike, fantastic exaggerations of the Party's membership were circulated (in one case, 600,000!), it did experience considerable growth. Even though the party played no role in beginning the Great Strike, and did little or nothing in many key centers during the uprising, in several important industrial areas, party speakers addressed large audiences—sometimes as many as ten thousand—thus reaching more workers in this country in two weeks than socialists had done in decades. For the first time, many workers in the United States heard discussions about the nature of the capitalist system and how socialism would solve many of its problems; how the government was controlled by the capitalists; and how the press served their interests. They were urged to join the party, and a fair number did, even though some did so despite their lack of respect for the vacillating and compromising role played by the party leadership in several key sectors of the Great Strike. The St. Louis party, for example, was a stronger organization, with many more members, a few months after the strike than it had been before.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that the speakers for the party cautioned against violent and rash acts, and bade the workers to organize; that the WPUS never advocated armed insurrection; and that its influence on the strikers was everywhere a moderating one—all this served to contradict the horrifying pictures of the socialists and communists that were painted in the press. Moreover, the same press showed how inaccurate its accounts were by publishing the complete program of the WPUS, its resolutions, circulars, and manifestoes issued during the strike—all in sharp contrast to the screaming headlines and editorials. Small wonder



that "A Red-Hot Striker" wrote that, while he knew nothing about the "Paris Commune," he could see that the party of socialists accused of seeking to establish a Commune in the United States "... represented the cause of the poor ... that its object is to give every human being born into this world a chance to live, live long and die well."<sup>61</sup>

Although the first nationwide strike in United States history ended in a defeat for labor, it still gave the workers a sense of their own power. The big question now was in what direction would this power be exerted. The answer was not long in coming.

## 6

## TRIUMPH OF THE "POLITICAL-ACTION SOCIALISTS"

During the great strike, the coverage of the Workingmen's Party in the daily newspapers helped to bring native-born converts into the organization. Among the first to join were Joseph Labadie and Judson Grenell, both young printers in Detroit. Grenell later described his introduction to the Workingmen's Party in his "Autobiography," the manuscript of which is in the Michigan State University Archives. He had already had considerable experience as a trade-union official in New Haven, Connecticut, as well as Detroit, when, one evening, as he was walking along a downtown street in the Michigan city, he saw a building draped with large red banners. "SOCIAL DEMOCRATS MEET HERE," the signs said. "Walk in — Admission Free." "Well, why not?" he thought to himself. The slogans at the front of the room read, "To everyone according to his deeds," and "He who will not work, neither shall he eat."<sup>1</sup> Grenell took a seat at the back of the room. As the speaker began, Grenell relates that he became fascinated—for the first time, he "saw ... an effort to explain the cause of poverty, in the midst of plenty." Wage workers, the socialist speakers insisted,

were continually creating surplus wealth which became the property of the employing class. ... the workers not receiving as much as they were creating, gluts in the market occurred, when work slackened and willing workers were idle until this surplus wealth had been absorbed by consumers—the workingman who had created the surplus. The way to avoid this ... was to create a cooperative commonwealth, with workingmen their own employers, and in which the compensation to each worker would be in proportion to individual production. Society collectively would be the only employer, and the employing class ... would melt into the mass, with their compensation measured by their ability to create wealth. Profit in business would be eliminated. The cost of production would govern prices.<sup>2</sup>



Together, Labadie and Grenell launched a variety of new programs aimed at spreading socialism beyond the German community of Detroit. For one thing, they started *The Socialist*, a weekly newspaper which served both as the city's labor newspaper and as a forum for English-speaking socialists in other cities. Grenell was editor and Labadie chief columnist of one of the few socialist papers in English in the United States.<sup>3</sup> They worked without pay in the evenings and on Sundays after sixty hours a week on their regular jobs. Along with a few other comrades, they wrote, printed, and distributed *The Socialist*. "After working all day," Grenell wrote in his "Autobiography," "it requires considerable grit and determination to take the only time we can call our own and hie to a dusty garret and set type by the light of a kerosene lamp."<sup>4</sup>

Their determination paid off. In December, 1877, *The Socialist* reported to its readers that it was doing well financially. The newspaper was received enthusiastically by sympathizers in many parts of the country, and it soon reported regular distribution in Chicago, Boston, Brooklyn, and Cincinnati, as well as in Evansville, Indiana, Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. By the summer of 1878, national party leaders moved the paper to Chicago where the growing socialist movement could provide it with a wider circulation. Grenell was offered the editorship but decided to remain in Detroit.<sup>5</sup>

*The Socialist* was now the official English-language organ of a party in which the Marxists no longer played any role.

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During the great labor uprising of 1877, the Workingmen's Party of the United States called a meeting in New York City on July 25 to support the railroad strikers. There was no mention in any of the speeches or in any of the resolutions adopted by the gathering of either trade unionism or the need for workers to organize more effectively on the economic front.<sup>6</sup> Angered by the Lassalleian control of the meeting as reflected in the speeches and resolutions, the Marxists in the New York section of the Workingmen's Party called another mass meeting the following night to voice the sympathy of the trade unions for the strikers. Present on the platform when the Cooper Union meeting got under way were delegates representing the custom tailors, ladies' shoemakers, bootmakers, cabinetmakers, carvers, cigarmakers, fresco painters, and typographical unions. The chief speaker was J.P. McDonnell, Marxist editor of the *Labor Standard*. He pointed out that since the onset of the panic in 1873, workers in the United States had been engaged "in a sort of guerrilla warfare for their rights"

in order to survive, and yet had been unable to avoid being reduced to "the verge of starvation." Still, he contended, these struggles were not in vain, for they had "culminated in the present revolt against oppression," and regardless of how quickly the Great Strike might end, and regardless of the final outcome, it would "leave marks behind that will never be forgotten." It revealed, for example, the identity of interests of workers throughout the nation, and that in one fell swoop, all obstacles to working-class unity could vanish in the crucible of the class struggle:

It was a grand sight to see in West Virginia, white and colored men standing together, men of all nationalities in one supreme contest for the common rights of workingmen. (*Loud cheers*). The barriers of ignorance and prejudice were fast falling before the growing intelligence of the masses. Hereafter there shall be no north, no south, no east, no west, only one land of labor and the workingmen must own and possess it. (*Tremendous applause*).

But, McDonnell insisted, unity and militancy were not enough: "We must organize. Unorganized, we are a mob and rabble; organized in one compact body, we are a power to be respected. (*Cheers*)." And if the workers permitted themselves to be fleeced by the employers, it was their own fault:

You have neglected your unions and allowed yourselves to be led by the nose by every swindling politician. (*Applause*). You are sheep without a shepherd. Union is your shepherd. Union thorough and complete—if you had that, do you think that one man could by nod of his head sentence you and your families to starvation? All this could be done without shedding a drop of blood or burning one depot. It is only the desperation of madness that prompts such acts, but it is justifiable because human nature cannot lie down to die. (*Applause and cheers*). Do not be rash; you have no power because you have no organization. This you can do, you men of different trades—join under the banner of your trade unions and become one powerful national federation. Then you can do something; then you can become a power that no one can afford to despise.

The resolutions, adopted unanimously, stressed the same theme. After voicing a "strong protest against the manner in which the militia have been used against the people," offering "fraternal greetings to the volunteer soldiers who fraternized with their fellow workmen," expressing "sincere sympathy with the railroad men and others who are now on strike," and pledging "to use every effort to render financial aid not only to the men on strike but to those work-people who have suffered by it," the resolutions concluded:



That it is the imperative duty of all workingmen to organize in trade unions and to aid in establishing a National Federation of all trades so that combined Capital can be successfully resisted and overcome.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, while both wings of the Workingmen's Party in New York had spoken out in support of the strikers, each had offered a different solution for the problems facing U.S. workers. The Lassalleans called for immediate political action of labor, while the Marxists urged the rebuilding of the trade unions, the organization of new unions, and the establishment of a powerful national labor federation.

Once the strikes were over, the Marxists insisted that the next immediate task was to create such a national federation of trade unions, with the demand for the eight-hour day as the unifying issue. They argued that executive committees set up during a struggle and scattered mass meetings were not enough. Strikers with hungry families to feed required swift relief payments, and hastily established committees could not meet this need. The strikes had proven the indispensability of trade unions capable of holding out against the employers' offensives.

But the Marxists knew that the strike experience had also given impetus to the "political socialists," to the advocates of greenbacks, and to other reformers. McDonnell warned the workers not to lend an ear to

the men who in this favored hour take hurried steps to catch the rising tide, who talk politics, clap trap and labor buncombe and refer to Trade Unions with faint praise, and who a few months ago held them up to public condemnation. Stand by the tried and true who never fail in darkness or in storm, stand by the Labor Press, and above all stand by your unions. There are no organizations so feared as Trades Unions.<sup>8</sup>

McDonnell, however, was whistling in the dark. The rush into politics was on, and nothing the Marxists said could halt it. Nor is this surprising. In the aftermath of the strikes, employers throughout the nation used the blacklist to great effect to weed strikers and union members out of their labor force. The fledgling unions had no resources with which to fight organized capital, and many disintegrated before the employer onslaught. In late 1877, the *Labor Standard* listed only nine national unions as still operating, and most of them existed more in name than in fact. Yet the forces unleashed by the strike could not wait for a new union resurgence. What good would it do to build unions if the government remained under the complete control of the capitalists? "The strikes have demonstrated more clearly than ever," declared a Lassalleian organ, "that the corporations have the law on their side;

they own the legislatures, they control most of the newspapers, and manufacture public opinion." Of what use would unions be if the corporations, by means of this control, were able to bring in armed forces to crush labor's struggles?<sup>9</sup>

To this others added the argument that business leaders were proposing more restrictive legislation against strikers and demanding a strengthening of the police, the state militia, and the United States Army in preparation for future conflicts. Already there was increased talk of limiting suffrage to the educated, and businessmen were applauding George Vest of Missouri for having said that "universal suffrage is a standing menace to all stable and good government. Its twin sister is the Commune with its labor unions, etc." Within two weeks after the strike, plans were under way to augment the Chicago police and the Illinois militia, to restrict the right of suffrage, and to limit the right to organize and strike. If the workers waited for a new union resurgence, went the argument, they would find themselves so restricted in what they could do that the unions would prove to be useless. In short, working-class control of government was a prelude to effective trade unionism rather than the other way around, as the Marxists claimed.<sup>10</sup>

It is not important to argue the merits of this contention. What is necessary is to understand that in the context of the post-1877 strikes atmosphere, it is not surprising that the trend in the WPUS was toward political action. Thus Karl Marx wrote to his old friend and co-worker, Frederick Engels, that although he felt that the strikes (which he called "the first uprising against the oligarchy of capital which had developed since the Civil War") would be suppressed, it "could very well be the point of origin for the creation of a serious workers' party in the United States."<sup>11</sup>

Within a few weeks after the strikes had ended, the rush to political action got under way. The first steps were taken on August 4, 1877, when a call was issued for the formation of an "independent movement to be called the Greenback-Labor Party."<sup>12</sup> This movement was the result of a conscious effort on the part of the Greenbackers, made up primarily of small farmers, to strengthen their electoral base by increasing their appeals to labor. Greenback Party clubs began to include demands for labor reforms in their programs and to select workingmen to fill certain posts as candidates. As a result, there developed a working-class, trade-union base of the Greenback Party which found expression in the new Greenback-Labor Party.<sup>13</sup>

This development confronted the Workingmen's Party of the United States soon after the Great Strike. However, it was not new. At the National Labor Congress, which had assembled in Pittsburgh



in April, 1876, Otto Weydemeyer, son of Joseph Weydemeyer and a leader of the Marxist forces in the Pittsburgh socialist movement, advocated the Marxist position. He opposed premature political action and urged that any ties with the Greenback currency reform movement be banned. His position prevailed, and the meeting's final resolution held that before venturing into independent political action, "the workingmen of the country should organize in Trade Unions and Labor Leagues first." But when the convention then proceeded to endorse various Greenback measures, the socialists walked out,<sup>14</sup> and they continued to resist the Greenback lure. "A New Haven Workingman" wrote a letter to *The Socialist* (predecessor of the *Labor Standard*), exposing the class character of the Greenback Party in his city:

What a nice *workingmen's* party is the Greenback! Look at its leaders: John P. Phillips, *lawyer*, worth, according to reported tax list, \$29,172; Joseph Sheldon, *lawyer*, worth \$53,000; Henry Killam, *carriage manufacturer*, worth \$45,000; Isaac Anders, director of a *National Bank*, worth \$20,000; Charles Atwater, *president of a bank*, worth \$30,192; Loren Judd, its candidate for Treasurer, one of the most wealthy manufacturers in New Britain. Phillips, Sheldon and Killam are large owners of real estate. Hence these immense labors, these weekly meetings, these wails over the condition of the laborer. What sympathy Isaac Anders, a National Banker, *must* have for workingmen. Alexander Troup, a former workingman's champion, now a leader in this Greenback movement for the benefit of the capitalists, is an unscrupulous and overbearing "boss" over his employees. He has recently cut down the pay of printers in the Union office. . . .<sup>15</sup>

During the 1877 strike, close relationships were built up between workers and farmers. The latter had shown their solidarity with the strikers in their battle against the hated railroad corporations. When the strikers in Scranton set up a relief store, they were supplied with food by the farmers. The *Scranton Republican* reported:

The farmers in the surrounding country have proved themselves very generous, and in many instances have donated batches of potatoes to the cause. They are dug up and hauled to the store by committees appointed for that purpose, and afterwards distributed wherever required.<sup>16</sup>

John J. James, Greenback leader, cited this and other examples of farmer support for the strikers when he wrote in an appeal to the *Labor Standard* for socialist endorsement of the Greenback-Labor movement: "It is purely a struggle of right against might, labor against capital, and every laborer in this country who is a voter ought to have

his place in the lists of the independents."<sup>17</sup> The *Labor Standard* gave its reply in an editorial entitled "The Greenbackers":

Wages are not regulated by the amount or kind of currency, public debts, higher or lower rates of interest, public economy or taxation. When the labor writers, editors and leaders will sit down to study the laws that govern wages, they will be forced to the conclusion that there is no way out of the wage system except through higher wages and more expansive humanity that will come with less hours of work.<sup>18</sup>

Locally, too, the socialists were rejecting offers from the Greenback-Labor Party. In Allegheny City, the socialists frustrated an attempt in August to hold a Greenback-Labor meeting among the iron workers. Evidently they had support for their stand, since Greenbacker A.C. Robertson reported that the socialists had "captured half of Allegheny."<sup>19</sup> The *National Labor Tribune* of Pittsburgh, by now practically an official organ of the Greenback-Labor Party, berated the socialists for their opposition, calling them "a few hobby riders who, wise in their own conceit, denounce everything and everybody."<sup>20</sup>

But Greenback-Labor appeals were beginning to affect some in the ranks of the WPUS, especially in the English-language sections. P.J. McGuire openly called for fusion with the Greenback-Laborites, proclaiming: "What we want is a *better system of money* so that it shall indeed represent labor, a better system of commerce, a better *monetary*, not *based on gold*, which is a commodity, but on work that produces the wealth itself." The *Labor Standard's* response was caustic: "Why should Mr. McGuire play a double part? Let him be either a labor man or a politician."<sup>21</sup>

Despite warnings from the Marxists, Greenback-Labor fusion did take place in Pittsburgh. In late August, 1877, a meeting was held between the English-speaking section of the WPUS and representatives of the Greenback-Labor Party "for the purpose of consolidating the two labor elements in the county for political action at the coming election." The fusion was ratified by the English-speaking members in Allegheny City, who, John D. French notes, "were to prove an important addition to the growing Greenback-Labor movement."<sup>22</sup> J.S. Jeffreys, one of the four elected Greenback-Labor officers who represented the WPUS section, described the "amicable agreement" that had been reached in a letter to the *Labor Standard*, concluding: "Those who opposed this action at first are becoming reconciled to the fact that there is work to be done and labor must do it."<sup>23</sup>

Jeffreys certainly could not have had the German and Bohemian socialists of Pittsburgh and Allegheny City in mind, for they rejected



the fusion. At a September 2, 1877 meeting, Otto Weydemeyer denounced the Greenback-Labor efforts as a snare and a delusion, declaring: "Workingmen's ears are often tickled by orators both in the pulpit and on the political stump, by the recital of their dignities as American citizens and the power of the ballot, but my friends, the ballot has lost its power." The only solution, he argues, lay in the "Trade Union, the only thing that ever achieved any good for us." When a committee of the Third Allegheny City Greenback-Labor Club made an appearance to urge the recalcitrant socialists to send a delegate to the upcoming convention, the meeting "refused to consider the proposition in any manner."<sup>24</sup>

The *Labor Standard* enthusiastically endorsed this stand. The leader of the fusion socialists forwarded the platform of the Greenback-Labor Party adopted by the Allegheny County convention, held early in September, and pointed out that a majority of the 204 delegates "were from the mines, mills and workshops of Allegheny County," that a good number were WPUS members and that several had been chosen as officers of the party, and that the Greenback-Labor platform included a call for action on the major grievances of workers, such as company stores, excessive hours, accidents, child and prison labor, cheating in the coal mines, and the abolition of conspiracy laws against the unions. Nevertheless, the *Labor Standard* responded coldly:

Our respected correspondent enclosed the platform. . . . Its first twelve or fourteen declarations are entirely of Greenback character and are purely of a political nature. The labor planks come at the tail end, which is where too many of our fellow workingmen will find themselves after the next election.<sup>25</sup>

To the Marxists, then, the "labor planks" were simply a cover behind which the Greenbackers sought to gain electoral support for the standard currency reform measures which, as far as workers were concerned, were simply a "snare and delusion."

Thus, a new split was emerging in the WPUS—not only between the adherents of building trade unions before rushing into premature political action and the adherents of immediate electoral activities, but also between those who favored political action plus fusion with the Greenback-Labor Party and those who believed that political action should be conducted solely through the WPUS. However, whatever form the political action might take, it was becoming clear that the advocates of such a course were growing in both numbers and influence. Interestingly, early in 1876, the *National Labor Tribune* had predicted that any "large secession of English-speaking members" would make the official policy of the WPUS against political action difficult to maintain because "the American naturally looks to politics

to reform anything."<sup>26</sup> As indicated above, the great labor uprising had brought with it a growth in the English-speaking sections of the party.

In another sense, it can be said that with longer experience in the movement and with personal knowledge of how middle-class reformers, especially currency reformers, had weakened and finally caused the dissolution of promising labor organizations, the Marxists felt that they had good reason to reject the course advocated by the fusionists. They never wavered in their belief that labor's energies should be spent in building trade unions, the only purely working-class organizations, rather than dissipating its strength in classless political ventures that had no chance of success. On the other hand, many others, mainly English-speaking socialists, while understanding somewhat the reluctance of the antifusion elements in the WPUS to provide political support for middle-class reform principles and candidates, nevertheless felt that it was a mistake for the socialists to shun reform efforts and political movements that were even more capable than the WPUS of mobilizing great masses of workers, including trade unionists. As far as the Lassalleans were concerned, the time seemed opportune to eliminate entirely the restrictions on political action contained in the WPUS platform, and they planned to ignore it, move full speed ahead into the political arena, and establish a new platform with the previous restrictions removed.<sup>27</sup>

The thinking of the German-American Marxists on these issues is revealed in a letter from C. Saam, a socialist from Allegheny City, to the *Labor Standard*:

Those workmen who still hold aloof, to you I say, combine; join our ranks and help us to wage war for the emancipation of humanity, read the socialist journals which represent your interests and those of the whole human race. Reflect upon your own condition, break loose from the existing parties, whether Republican, Democratic or Greenback, all of which are exclusively bent on their own interest. Beware of so-called workmen's friends, who join our ranks with an eye to office. Until we can produce men out of our own ranks, fit to hold office, let us hold aloof from politics. But let us labor in the meantime for the organization and emancipation of the working classes, doing all we can to induce the workmen to combine [into trade unions], whereby, in my judgment, we shall do more to promote our interests than by interfering in politics before our strength is fully developed, as, for instance, in the case with our English-speaking fellow members in Allegheny Co[unty]. We Germans know full well, first that we were not strong enough to take a hand in the coming autumn elections, second having no members whom we could elect to these offices, third knowing that our



election would be of no use. Those members of our organization who brought about this combination have grossly violated the fundamental principles of our constitution, or else they would not have displayed such unbounded ignorance. Let us not be precipitate—let us bide our time—it will come soon.<sup>28</sup>

The Marxists, however, were now a minority within the WPUS, a fact that was clearly illustrated by the National Executive Committee's total indifference to their vehement opposition to the committee's unrestrained encouragement of local WPUS electoral campaigns in the aftermath of the 1877 uprising. The German section of Hoboken (New Jersey), the German and Bohemian sections of Allegheny City, and the German section of Pittsburgh all publicly protested the decision, pointing to the party declaration which said: "The party will not enter into a political campaign before being strong enough to exercise a perceptible influence." The protests were ignored, which led the *Labor Standard* to cease calling itself the "Organ of the Workingmen's Party of the United States" and to describe itself instead as the "Organ of the Wage Workers of the United States."<sup>29</sup> But the only ones among whom these internal developments aroused a stir in the midst of the rush to politics were the Marxists.

On August 6 came sensational news from Louisville. In that city, the Workingmen's Party elected five out of seven candidates for the state legislature and won 8,850 of the 13,578 votes cast, placing it ahead of the Democrats. The victory took place on a platform advocating an eight-hour day, compulsory education, prohibition of labor by children under fourteen years of age, and prohibition of prison labor. But the first plank in the platform read: "A better financial policy than the one which has impoverished the masses, brought utter stagnation upon commerce, and thrown out of employment millions of people."<sup>30</sup> The plank was inserted at the insistence of the Greenbackers, who had joined forces with the Workingmen's Party.

Inspired by the news from Louisville, Workingmen's Party tickets were nominated in city after city where there were socialist sections, but in many cases, as in Louisville, their platform included concessions to reformers and Greenbackers. In Pittsburgh, the socialists and Greenbackers nominated a joint ticket. In Chicago, the Workingmen's Party united with reformers who advocated a change in taxation procedures of the city so that wealthy citizens would not escape paying their fair share. An election appeal by the Workingmen's Party of Chicago read:

WORKINGMEN, ATTENTION!

Tax Payers, Attention!

All Good Citizens, Attention!

Twenty thousand workingmen are out of employment—Starvation will be their fate this winter! Why are not the more necessary public works carried on? Why are not the streets cleaned, the sewers completed—why is not the City Hall built up? Because the great Money Lords and Real Estate Kings are holding back the payment of their taxes!

Three millions have been due the three years past. We have now to ENFORCE their collection. Why do not our City officials do their duty?

To the "Chicago Times" and "Chicago Tribune." Abuse of the workingmen's movement comes with most propriety from newspapers which pay their taxes.<sup>31</sup>

An interesting feature of the WPUS electoral campaigns in 1877 was the effort to establish Black-white unity. In Maryland, the Workingmen's Party appealed to workers and all citizens "without regard to race, nationality or political creed" to support its candidates.<sup>32</sup> In Cincinnati, the Workingmen's Party nominated Peter H. Clark for state superintendent of schools. The other candidates on the socialist ticket were a white native-born citizen, a Bohemian, a German cigar maker, and an Irish stone cutter. But the socialist *Emancipator* called for special efforts to amass a big vote for the Black candidate:

Peter H. Clark of all the candidates on the ticket most thoroughly represents the contest between laborers and capitalists, of the proscribed race, whose sorrows made the name of the United States the synonym of robbery and murder throughout the world; his nomination is therefore above all the finest vindication of the claim that the Workingmen's Party is a purely cosmopolitan organization.

But a long time since this man of learning and culture, now the principal of our colored schools, was a youth, on the streets of Cincinnati battling for a living as a newspaper carrier, hated and proscribed because he belonged to a class whose labors had opened every field in the South, and whose woes and miseries had laden every breeze with appeals to the hearts of the just for the wrong and injustice of slavery to be lifted off of Africa's outraged sons and daughters.

Clark campaigned enthusiastically for the Workingmen's Party. That summer and fall, he spoke for the socialists in Louisville and Jeffersonville, Indiana. A Louisville socialist wrote: "Clark for reasoning can't be beat."<sup>33</sup>

The candidates nominated by the local sections for the autumn election met with considerable success. The approximate vote was: in Chicago, 7,000; Cincinnati (Clark ran ahead of the entire ticket), 9,000; Buffalo, 6,000; Milwaukee, 1,500; New York, 1,800; Brooklyn, 1,200; New Haven, 1,600; and Detroit, 800. By the time the results were in,



the majority of the local sections were in revolt against the rules adopted in July, 1876, and were supporting the Lassalleans in their demand that they be revised so as to permit unrestricted participation in electoral campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

The Marxists warned that a rush to the ballot box without careful preparations in advance and without trade-union support would never secure lasting results. The electoral success in the fall of 1877, they cautioned, was no proof of the need to revise the party rules. All it demonstrated was that if the party combined with reformers, Greenbackers, and even worse elements, it could chalk up temporary gains at the polls, but socialist principles would go out the window. Already in San Francisco, some leaders and many members of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, were uniting with the Workingmen's Party of California, led by the unprincipled demagogue, Denis Kearney, and organized solely against the "Chinese menace," even though it included a few reformist planks in its platform. Previously, Kearney had been rejected for membership in the WPUS as an enemy of the working class, and "The Chinese Must Go" slogan he had popularized had been attacked by the California socialists as an obstacle to the proper solution of the Chinese problem. (The "proper solution," in the eyes of the Marxists, was to oppose the importation of Chinese workers for anti-labor activity, but to endorse the voluntary immigration of Chinese, and to organize Chinese workers in the United States, along with other workers, and raise their wages through trade-union activity.) But in their desire for popularity and electoral success at any cost, the WPUS leaders in San Francisco were ready to sacrifice socialist principles. The Marxists maintained that only by standing by established policy and avoiding premature political activity could the socialist movement be built on a true foundation.<sup>35</sup>

But they were wasting their breath. Even though a referendum on the need for a new convention to revise the party's attitude toward political action was rejected, on October 14, 1877, the Lassallean-dominated Executive Committee and the Board of Control jointly issued a call for a convention to meet in Newark on November 11. By the time the convention met on December 26, a month and a half later than the date specified in the call, the electoral results had strengthened the Lassallean position in the various sections of the party. Moreover, since the Marxists—Sorge, McDonnell, Weydemeyer, and Speyer—refused to attend the convention, the "political-action socialists" had a free hand in Newark.<sup>36</sup>

The "National Platform and Principles of the Socialistic Labor Party," the new name given to the WPUS, declared:

Labor being the source of all wealth, and useful labor being possible only by and through the associated efforts of the people, the results of Labor should, therefore, in all justice, belong to Society. The system under which society is now organized is imperfect and hostile to the general welfare, since through it the directors of Labor, necessarily a small minority, are enabled in the competitive struggle, to practically monopolize all the means of labor—all opportunities to produce for and supply the wants of the people—and the masses are therefore maintained in poverty and dependence. The industrial emancipation of labor, which must be achieved by the working classes themselves, independent of all political parties but their own, is consequently the great end, to which every political movement should be subordinate as a means.

The platform then called for "one Great Labor Party" and "the organization of National and International Trade and Labor Unions upon a socialistic basis." It called for the nationalization of the economy "as fast as possible" and for the abolition of the wage system.

Seventeen demands were included in the platform, together with the comment that they were "measures to ameliorate the condition of the working people under our present competitive system and to gradually accomplish the entire removal of the same." Among the seventeen demands, some were taken from the WPUS platform; and the following were added:

1. Prohibition of the employment of female labor in occupations detrimental to the health or morality, and equalization of women's wages with those of men, where equal service is performed.
2. Wages should be paid in lawful money of the Nation and at intervals of time not exceeding one week.
3. A graded income tax should replace indirect taxation.
4. The right of suffrage shall in no wise be abridged.
5. Direct popular legislation, enabling the people to propose or reject any law at their will, and introduction of minority representation.
6. Public officials should be subject to recall.
7. The nationalization of banking and insurance.
8. The importation of Coolies under contract must be immediately prohibited, and those now in America under similar obligations shall be released from the same.

The demands taken from the WPUS platform were the only legacy remaining from the first Marxist party in the United States. The *Labor Standard* and *Vorbote* were stricken from the list of party organs because of their position in favor of trade unionism, and all obstacles



to immediate political campaigning were removed. The main purpose of the party, it was now asserted, was the mobilization of the working class for political action. In a subsidiary statement, it was affirmed that the party "should maintain friendly relations with the trade unions and should promote their formation upon socialistic principles," but it was made quite clear that the role of the party was expressed in the slogan: "*Science the Arsenal, Reason the Weapon, the Ballot the Missile.*"<sup>37</sup>

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With the formation of the Socialistic Labor Party, the career of the Workingmen's Party of the United States came to an end. In the course of its brief existence, it made several important contributions. It recruited, publicized, and nominated for office the first Black socialist in American history. It played an important role in several key areas during the "Great Upheaval of 1877," bringing to thousands of workers in the United States, for the first time, the principles of a socialist organization. Probably its greatest contribution, however, was the great debate that emerged during its existence between the Marxists and the Lassalleans at party and trade-union meetings and in the party press. This debate publicized the Marxist principles that the economic struggles of the workers and the political movement of the working class were indivisible; that organization of workers on the economic front was necessary before political power could be achieved by the working class; and that the most important duty of the American socialists—the "Necessity of the Hour"—was to help organize the working class into effective trade unions. While the "political-action socialists" were not convinced in the course of the debate, the Marxists' arguments were influential among a whole school of trade unionists—nonsocialist as well as socialist—and were of the utmost importance in the creation of the modern U.S. labor movement. This was the major contribution of the First International to American labor, and this was likewise the main contribution of its lineal descendant—the Workingmen's Party of the United States.

## 7

## EPILOGUE

In 1876, the Marxists had agreed to unity with the Lassalleans on the basis of the principle that the major attention of the socialists should now be directed toward rebuilding the trade unions and establishing new ones, leaving political action to wait for the day when a strong labor movement could make it an effective weapon of the workers in the class struggle. It was this principle—the principle of the International Workingmen's Association—that had been embodied in the platform of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. When it was discarded, Sorge, McDonnell, Speyer, and Weydemeyer withdrew from the party and sought to make it a reality outside the Lassallean-dominated socialist movement. They realized that two things were immediately necessary: first, some means of bringing the skilled and unskilled workers together; and second, a national organization uniting all trades for collective action. In 1878, together with Ira Steward and George E. McNeill, the eight-hour advocates, the Marxists who had left the Workingmen's Party established the International Labor Union to organize the unskilled workers, unite them with the skilled workers, and together build a new U.S. labor movement.<sup>1</sup> Although the Declaration of Principles, the platform of the ILU, represented a compromise between the two groups who had combined to form the organization,<sup>2</sup> the tactics were distinctly influenced by Sorge, McDonnell and the other Marxists. The ILU would seek "to secure the following measures":

The reduction of the hours of labor; higher wages; factory, mine and workshop inspection; abolition of the contract convict and truck systems;<sup>3</sup> employers to be held responsible for accidents by neglected machinery; prohibition of child labor; the establishment of Labor Bureaus; labor propaganda by means of a labor press; labor lectures; the employment of a general organizer; and the final abolition of the wage system. . . .



The methods by which we propose to secure these measures are:

1st. The formation of an Amalgamated Union of laborers so that members of any calling can combine under a central head, and form a part of the Amalgamated Trades' Union.

2nd. The establishment of a general fund for benefit and protective purposes.

3rd. The organization of all workingmen in their Trade Unions, and the creation of such Unions where none exist.

4th. The National and International amalgamation of all Labor Unions.<sup>4</sup>

To carry out these objectives, a provisional central committee was chosen with members in eighteen states. Among them were Albert R. Parsons and George Schilling of Chicago; Otto Weydemeyer of Pittsburgh; Friedrich A. Sorge of Hoboken, New Jersey; and George Gunton and Ira Steward of Massachusetts. An executive board of seven, with George E. McNeill as president, functioned for the provisional central committee when that body was not in session.<sup>5</sup>

The key principle of the International Labor Union was set forth in the third of the "methods" by which the organization hoped to achieve its objective: "The organization of all workingmen in their Trades Unions, and the creation of such Unions where none exist." This was diametrically opposed to the outlook set forth in the platform of the Socialistic Labor Party, which projected electoral activity as the means of achieving its objective. Yet Albert R. Parsons, George Schilling and other SLP members of Chicago, and Adolph Douai of New York City were active in both the ILU and the SLP. These men viewed the methods advocated by both organizations, while seemingly diametrically opposite, as actually complementary, and they hoped to convince the leaders of both organizations to share their outlook.<sup>6</sup>

The objective of the International Labor Union was to build a mass labor organization, and according to President McNeill it "presents a plan by which the unorganized masses and local unions can become affiliated." Its aim, he continued, was "to band together Jew, Greek, Irishman, American, English and German, and all nationalities in a grand labor brotherhood." Through it, the trade unions would "be stimulated into a new and more vigorous life," and in it, workers of any nationality, creed, or color would join hands together "until freedom shall be achieved for all."<sup>7</sup> Adolph Douai hailed McNeill's statement and stressed the special need for carrying the principles of the International Labor Union to Black workers in the South:

The Negro population of the South deserves our kindest and most careful attention. They are almost the only laboring people there.

Few of them are anything but wage slaves. Without their gathering into our fold, one half of this country must remain adverse or indifferent to our movement. Beginning with their enlightenment in our purposes in such places as Baltimore, Washington, Louisville, St. Louis, and wherever our Labor Unions are spreading, we might achieve what otherwise cannot be done. We might loosen the hold of their white employers on them.<sup>8</sup>

But the International Labor Union never penetrated the South. Although the founders intended an organization that would unite all unskilled workers in the United States,<sup>9</sup> the International Labor Union was dominated by textile workers, all of whom were in the North. The ILU led the textile workers in great strikes during 1878-1880 in Paterson and Passaic, New Jersey, Clinton and Cohoes, New York, Fall River, Massachusetts, and other Northern cities.<sup>10</sup>

At its height, the International Labor Union had 8,000 members, but many strike failures caused a decline in membership. By February, 1880, there were no more than 1,500 members in the organization, and a year later, it fell apart, with only one branch remaining—in Hoboken, New Jersey—where Friedrich A. Sorge lived. By 1884, even this branch had gone out of existence.<sup>11</sup>

Following the decline of the International Labor Union, a number of Marxists began working with a group of nonsocialist trade-union leaders, headed by Samuel Gompers, to create a new federation of labor. Sorge was not part of the group since he was no longer publicly active, but he was sought out by the leaders of the trade unions as their organizations slowly began to recover from the depression of the mid-1870's. He met with them to discuss the relationship between trade unionism and socialism and the importance of insulating any new federation of labor from middle-class panaceas, of keeping it from rushing into politics, and of basing it upon the working class alone. In his autobiography, Gompers, who was one of the group that met with Sorge, paid tribute to the socialist leader from Hoboken, New Jersey, as one of the men who had driven home to the trade unionists of the post-depression years the principle that "the trade union was the fundamental agency through which we could achieve economic power, which would in turn give us social and political power."<sup>12</sup>

Sorge was not present at the founding convention of the American Federation of Labor in Pittsburgh on November 15, 1881, but about half a dozen Marxists were. The Pittsburgh *Commercial Gazette* of November 16, 1881, reported that the "Socialistic element is pretty well represented here," but it was confident "that the Socialistic element will be prevented not only from capturing its organization, but from introducing any of their peculiar ideas into the declaration of principles to be prepared." The Marxists were, however, influential in



shaping several important features of the new organization. Sorge wrote later that "the skilled workmen delegates showed a tendency to limit the organization to skilled workers, but this was easily overcome."<sup>13</sup> The Marxists at the convention, who had consulted with Sorge before departing for Pittsburgh, led the battle to establish a federation of labor which would unite the skilled and unskilled, men and women, Black and white, and native-born and foreign-born workers. To accomplish their objective, they joined forces with delegates from the Knights of Labor<sup>14</sup> and urged adoption of a name for the federation which would encompass all workers. Instead of "Federation of Organized Trades' Unions of the United States and Canada," which was proposed by Gompers and other delegates from the craft unions—a name which signified that the federation would be composed of skilled craftsmen only—the Marxist-Knights of Labor coalition proposed "Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada," a name which made it clear that all workers, and not merely the skilled, would be organized and brought into the new federation. Speaking in favor of the latter name, Pollinger, a Marxist from New York, declared: "We recognize neither creed, color nor nationality, but want to take into the folds of this organization the whole labor element of the country, no matter of what calling; for that reason the name should read, 'Trades and Labor Unions.'" He was supported by Grandeson, a Black member of the Knights of Labor in Pittsburgh, who told the delegates:

We have in the city of Pittsburgh many men in our organization who have no particular trade, but should not be excluded from the Federation. Our object is, as I understand it, to federate the whole laboring element of America. I speak more particularly of my own people and declare to you that it would be dangerous to skilled mechanics to exclude from this organization the common laborers, who might, in an emergency, be employed in positions they could readily qualify themselves to fill.<sup>15</sup>

On a vote, the proposed change was unanimously adopted, and the name became the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada. This was to remain its name until 1886, when it was changed to the American Federation of Labor.<sup>16</sup>

The Marxists also helped shape the preamble to the constitution. In fact, the Pittsburgh *Telegraph* expressed concern over the fact that the preamble was "a purely Marxian document which breathes a spirit of conflict rather than pacification."<sup>17</sup> It read:

Whereas, a struggle is going on in the nations of the civilized world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor, which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the

toiling millions of all nations if not combined for mutual protection and benefit. This history of the wage-workers of all countries is but the history of constant struggle and misery engendered by ignorance and disunion; whereas the history of the non-producers of all ages proves that a minority, thoroughly organized, can work wonders for good or evil. . . . Conforming to the old adage, "In union there is strength," the formation of a Federation embracing every trade and labor organization in North America, a union founded upon a basis as broad as the land we live in, is our only hope.<sup>18</sup>

The Federation's platform also reflected a Marxist influence. It opened membership in the Federation to wage workers only, rejected currency reform and producers' cooperatives, and made it clear that the Federation regarded the industrial capitalist, not the financier or politician, as the chief enemy of the wage-earners. The objectives of the newly-formed federation, listed by the convention, were mainly objectives the Marxists had been emphasizing, especially since the onset of the "Great Depression":

1. The encouragement and formation of Trades and Labor Unions.
2. The encouragement and formation of Trades and Labor Assemblies or Councils.
3. The encouragement and formation of National and International Trades Unions.
4. To secure legislation favorable to the interests of the industrial classes.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, what had been happening to the Lassalleian-dominated Socialistic Labor Party, or, as it was now known, the Socialist Labor Party?

As the Marxists had predicted, the socialist upsurge at the polls was a brief one. After scoring considerable electoral successes during the spring and fall elections of 1878, the Socialist Labor Party's vote in the autumn elections of 1879 registered a serious decline. In Chicago alone, it fell from 12,000 to 4,800.<sup>20</sup> "The political striker had taken the place of the railroad strikers," commented an independent paper on the political upsurge following the strikes of 1877.<sup>21</sup> But it was the Greenback-Labor Party, not the Socialist Labor Party, that ultimately gained the benefit of the working class's turn to independent political action.<sup>22</sup>

The "political-action socialists" either shrugged this development off as evidence that "the workingmen are still blind and thoughtless," or sought to ally the Socialist Labor Party closely to the Greenback-Labor movement. Or else, disillusioned with political action, some moved toward anarchism and the use of force as the solution for the



problems of the working class. (This faction, which was syndicalist and anarchist in tendency, was led by Albert R. Parsons, August Spies, and Johann Most, and withdrew in 1881.)<sup>23</sup> The Lassalleans controlled the party organization until 1889, but even Philip Van Patten, the Lassallean leader of the party for a number of years, conceded the correctness of the Marxist position. After the disastrous 1879 elections, he wrote in the official party bulletin:

The only reliable foundation today is the trade union organization and while political efforts of a sporadic nature will often achieve temporary success, yet the only test of political strength is the extent to which trade union organization backs up the political movement.<sup>24</sup>

In 1885, the Socialist Labor Party adopted a clear trade-union orientation without, however, repudiating electoral action, and it began to play a major role with the Marxists in building the American Federation of Labor and opposing the increasingly antiunion and anti-strike leadership of the Knights of Labor.<sup>25</sup> Once again, the principles of Marxism were influential in the shaping of the modern labor movement.

After a period of protracted illness, Karl Marx died in his London home on March 14, 1883, less than two months before his sixty-fifth birthday. When the transatlantic telegraph relayed this news from England, leaders of the socialist and labor movements in the United States, after consulting with Sorge, who was in touch with Engels by cable, organized memorial meetings in several cities. Although arrangements had to be completed within only a few days, the memorial in New York City, sponsored by the Central Labor Union of Greater New York and Vicinity, was not only larger than any other in the world at the time, but was a milestone in the history of the U.S. working class. Bismarck's antisocialist law prevented any commemoration from being held in Germany, nor were there any memorials in England or France. But in addition to the memorial meeting in New York City, another was held in Brooklyn, where the U.S. flag atop the Brooklyn Labor Lyceum flew at half-mast for an entire week. There were also meetings in New Haven, Cleveland, and Chicago.

In the Great Hall of Cooper Union in New York City, where Abraham Lincoln had spoken on the eve of the Civil War, thousands of working people paid homage to the memory of Karl Marx. It was, in the words of one trade-union paper, "the greatest demonstration ever held in the American labor movement in honor of any man."<sup>26</sup> The New York *Sun* gave this account of the event:

A Great International Memorial Meeting of Workingmen;  
Thousands Turned Away from the Doors of Cooper Union;  
Addresses in English, German, Russian, Bohemian and French.

If the great hall of Cooper Union had been twice as large as it is, it could not have held the vast throng of workingmen who gathered last evening to do honor to the memory of Dr. Karl Marx. Long before the hour set for the meeting, every seat was taken, people of all trades, from all lands—Americans, Germans, Russians, Italians, Bohemians, and French. There were many ladies present. On the platform were many men prominent in such meetings.<sup>27</sup>

The special significance of this meeting, apart from its extraordinary size and the depth of feeling it revealed for the author of *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto* and the guiding figure in the International Workingmen's Association—the First International—lay in the fact that it was the first time that representatives of all the diverse and opposing sections of the working-class movement in the United States had assembled together.<sup>28</sup> Such was Marx's stature in the United States at the time that these hostile factions entered into a coalition to honor the memory of a man whom the official organ of the Central Labor Union called "The Teacher."<sup>29</sup> This coalition included members of the Knights of Labor and the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, Marxists and Lassalleans, followers of Henry George and anarchists. Equally significant was the fact that it was the first time that the various groups of foreign-born and native workers bridged the differences of language and background for a major event in the labor movement.<sup>30</sup>

Karl Marx did not live to see the spectacular fruition of his teachings when his call to the "workers of all countries" to unite was taken up on May 1, 1890, with workers on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrating to demand the eight-hour day. This demonstration was the product of an initiative taken in the United States six years earlier. It was at its 1884 convention that the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada adopted the historic resolution, introduced by Gabriel Edmonston of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, which asserted that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout this district that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution."<sup>31</sup> The following year, the Federation repeated its determination that an eight-hour system was to go into effect through a universal strike of all workers on May 1, 1886.<sup>32</sup>

"Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will" became the slogan of the federation's call for an eight-hour national stoppage on May 1, 1886. In the months prior to May 1st, thousands of workers—skilled and unskilled, men and women, Black and white, native-born and immigrants, organized and unorganized,



members of both the Knights of Labor (despite the opposition of the Knights' top leadership) and of the federation, and of the various wings of the socialist movement—were drawn into the struggle for the shorter working day. "There is an eight-hour agitation everywhere," reported *John Swinton's Paper*, a leading labor weekly, in mid-April, 1886. By that time, almost a quarter of a million industrial workers were involved in the movement, and so powerful was the upsurge that about 30,000 workers had already been granted a nine or eight-hour day.<sup>33</sup>

On May 1, 1886, about 350,000 workers in over 11,000 establishments throughout the country went on strike for the eight-hour day. About 40,000 went out in Chicago alone, and more than 45,000 workers nationwide were granted the shorter working day without striking. Writing from New York, José Martí, the Cuban revolutionary leader, noted that "rebellion exists throughout the nation."<sup>34</sup>

An employers' counter-offensive followed the May 1, 1886, strikes, culminating in the Haymarket Affair, halted, but did not end the struggle for the eight-hour day.<sup>35</sup> Within two years, the workers had reformed their lines and were in a position to actively renew the movement. Across the Atlantic, meanwhile, the determination of the U.S. workers to gain the eight-hour day was being hailed, and labor organizations in England, France, Germany, and other European countries instituted steps to advance the movement. On June 14, 1889, the hundredth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille and the beginning of the French Revolution, representatives of the organized socialist movements of many lands met in Paris at the founding congress of the Second International. A resolution was introduced favoring an "international manifestation" for May 1, 1890, in support of the eight-hour day, and the Paris Congress resolved: "To organize a great international demonstration, so that in all countries and in all cities on the appointed day, the toiling masses shall demand of the state authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours." It added:

Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1890, by the American Federation of Labor at its Convention in St. Louis, December, 1889, the day is accepted for the international demonstration.<sup>36</sup>

May 1, 1890, witnessed one of the most powerful demonstrations of labor the world had yet seen. Tens of thousands of workers demonstrated throughout the world—in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Cuba, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary,

Italy, Peru, Switzerland, and the United States. "Few voices responded when we proclaimed these words 'Workers of the world unite' to the world forty-two years ago [in the *Communist Manifesto*]," wrote Frederick Engels. "Today the working men of all countries are united indeed." He added:

Because today, as I write these lines, the European and American proletariat is reviewing its fighting forces, mobilized for the first time, mobilized as *one* army, under *one* flag, for *one* immediate aim: the standard eight-hour working day . . .

If only Marx were still by my side to see this with his own eyes!<sup>37</sup>

Sorge was not at Engels' side, but he did live to see the eight-hour demonstration in New York City on May 1, 1890, and watch seventy trade unions march in the demonstration, many of their members socialists, who, together with nonsocialist unionists, carried red flags along with U.S. flags. (In Chicago, 30,000 workers marched under the joint sponsorship of the AFL and the Socialist Labor Party.) The slogans on the banners carried by the demonstrators in New York reflected the socialist influence: "No More Bosses — Wage Slavery Must Go — The Present Industrial System Means Robbery — The 8-Hour Day is the Next Step in the Labor Movement — The Socialistic Commonwealth is the Final Aim."<sup>38</sup>

Sorge also lived to see Samuel Gompers become increasingly hostile to socialism and socialists as he grew more and more conservative and as the AFL replaced the doctrine of class struggle embodied in the preamble to its constitution with one of class collaboration. He also lived to see the AFL develop into an organization made up primarily of skilled workers in the craft unions and one that increasingly neglected the needs of the unskilled and semiskilled workers, especially those in the mass-production industries and particularly Blacks, women, and the "new" immigrant workers.<sup>39</sup> This was certainly a far cry from the prediction Sorge had made in his *Socialism and the Worker*, where he foresaw that the trade unions would "transcend the narrow limits they made for themselves" and would "expand and embrace the whole class of workers in this country."

Yet Sorge and other Marxists always believed that the AFL, with all of its limitations, represented a major breakthrough in the development of the labor movement in the United States, and that the Marxists were largely responsible for this advance. Unlike many of its predecessors, and also unlike its contemporary—the Knights of Labor—the AFL was composed exclusively of wage earners, leaving no room for non-working-class elements who could divert the trade unions from the



day-to-day struggles in the interests of the workers. Sorge always believed that a major error of a number of labor leaders of the post-Civil War era was their readiness to hitch the labor movement to the wagons of various utopian reformers who promised an easy solution, through political action, to all of the problems of the working class. He placed in this category such utopian nostrums as the single tax, currency reform, producers' cooperatives, and other enticing, all-embracing plans to lift the working class out of wage slavery through one shortcut or another. One of the results of this capitulation to middle-class reformist panaceas, Sorge emphasized, was that it tended to push the class struggle out of the minds of the workers by spreading the illusion that they could be transformed into farmers, independent businessmen, or cooperative self-employers in an economic system in which workers were likely to remain workers throughout their lives. Through the Workingmen's Party of the United States, the Marxists had sought to eliminate these influences among the workers and to impress upon them the need to form effective trade unions to carry on the class struggle in U.S. society. They had not succeeded, owing to the domination of the Lassalleans and their allies, but their ideas had penetrated deeply into the U.S. labor movement. In adopting these principles, the American Federation of Labor had placed the labor movement on a solid, working-class foundation.<sup>40</sup>

For all these reasons, Friedrich A. Sorge, the outstanding Marxist in the United States, felt that in its formative stage, the American Federation of Labor, despite its weaknesses and inadequacies, constituted an important step forward for the U.S. working class. Although it represented only a minority of that class—the skilled workers—its approach was a working-class one, and on this basis, future advances could be built.<sup>41</sup>

## APPENDIX

### DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

The emancipation of the working classes must be achieved by the working classes themselves independent of all political parties of the propertied classes.

The struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule.

The economical subjection of the man of labor to the monopolizer of the means of labor, the sources of life, lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence.

The economical emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end, to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means.

All efforts aiming at that great end have hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labor in each country, and from the absence of concerted action between the workingmen of all countries.

The emancipation of labor is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution upon the practical and theoretical concurrence and co-operation of the most advanced countries.

For these reasons, the Workingmen's Party of the United States has been founded.

It enters into proper relations and connection with the workingmen of other countries.

Political liberty without economical independence being but an empty phrase we shall in the first place direct our efforts to the economical question.



We repudiate entirely connection with all political parties of the propertied classes without regard to their name.

We demand that all the means of labor (land, machinery, railroads, telegraphs, canals, etc.) become the common property of the whole people, for the purpose of abolishing the wages system, and substituting in its place co-operative production with a just distribution of its rewards.

The political action of the Party is confined generally to obtaining legislative acts in the interests of the working class proper. It will not enter into a political campaign before being strong enough to exercise a perceptible influence, and then in the first place locally in the towns or cities, when demands of a purely local character may be presented, providing they are not in conflict with the platform and principles of the Party.

We work for the organization of trades unions upon a national and international basis to ameliorate the condition of the working people and to seek to spread therein the above principles.

The Workingmen's Party of the United States proposes to introduce the following measures, as a means to improve the condition of the working classes:

1. Eight hours for the present as a normal working day, and legal punishment of all violators.
2. Sanitary inspection of all conditions of labor, means of subsistence and dwellings included.
3. Establishment of bureaus of labor statistics in all States as well as by the National Government; the officers of these bureaus to be taken from the ranks of the labor organizations and elected by them.
4. Prohibition of the use of prison labor by private employers.
5. Prohibitory laws against the employment of children under 14 years of age in industrial establishments.
6. Gratuitous instruction in all educational institutions.
7. Strict laws making employers liable for all accidents to the injury of their employees.
8. Gratuitous administration of justice in all courts of law.
9. Abolition of all conspiracy laws.
10. Railroads, telegraphs, and all means of transportation to pass into the hands of and to be operated by the Government.
11. All industrial enterprises to be placed under the control of the Government as fast as practicable and operated by free co-operative trades unions for the good of the whole people.

## CONSTITUTION OF THE WORKINGMEN'S PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

The affairs of the party shall be conducted by three bodies: The Congress, the *Executive Committee* and *Board of Supervision*.

### ARTICLE I.—THE CONGRESS

1. At least every two years a Congress shall be held, composed of the delegates from the different Sections that have been connected with the party at least two months previously and complied with all their duties. Sections of less than 100 members shall be entitled to one delegate, from 100 to 200 to two delegates and to one more delegate for every additional one hundred.

(See also II. 4.d, and II. 4.)

2. No suspended Section shall be admitted to a seat before the Congress has examined and passed judgment on its case. It shall, however, be the duty of every Congress to put such cases on the order of business and dispose of them immediately after the election of its officers.

3. The Congress defines and establishes the political position of the party, decides finally all differences within the party, appoints time and place of the next Congress and designates the seat of the Executive Committee and of the Board of Supervision.

4. The entire expenses of the Congress as well as the mileage and salary of the delegates shall be paid by the party and provided for by a special tax to be levied six weeks before the Congress meets.—Before the year 1880 however no mileage will be paid beyond the 36th degree of northern latitude, nor beyond the 95th degree of western longitude (Greenwich).

5. All propositions and motions to be considered and acted upon by the Congress shall be communicated to all Sections at least 6 weeks previously. (See also II.3f., II. 4., IV. 7., VI. 6. and press regulation No. 19.)

### II. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. The Executive Committee shall consist of seven members and shall appoint from its own midst one corresponding secretary, one recording secretary, one financial secretary and one treasurer.

a. The E.C. shall be elected by the Sections of the place designated as its seat and vacancies shall be filled in the same way.

2. The E.C. shall hold office from one Congress to the ensuing one.



## 3. The duties of the E.C. shall be:

a. To execute all resolutions of Congress and to see that they are strictly observed by all Sections and members.

b. To organize and centralize the propaganda.

c. To represent the organization at home and abroad;

d. To entertain and open relations with the workingmen's parties of other countries.

e. To make a quarterly report to the Sections concerning the state of the organization and its financial position.

f. To make all necessary preparations for the Congress as well as a detailed report to the same on all party-matters.

## 4. Rights and powers of the E.C.

a. The E.C. with the concurrence of the Board of Supervision may refuse to admit to the organization individuals and Sections as well as suspend members and sections till the next Congress for injuring the party interests.

b. In case of urgency the E.C. may make suitable propositions, which propositions shall become binding if approved of by a majority of the members of the party within two months.

c. The E.C. has the right to establish rules and regulations for the policy to be observed by the party-papers, to watch their course and in cases of vacancy to appoint editors pro tempore.

d. The E.C. may send the corresponding secretary as delegate to the Congress. The delegate will have no vote and shall be prohibited from accepting any other credentials.

5. The salary of the party officers is fixed by the E.C. with the concurrence of the Board of Supervision. (See also IV. 6., V. 2., VI. 4., VII. 2., VII. 13., and the press regulations No. 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 13 and 17.)

6. The corresponding secretary shall copy all documents and writings issued by the E.C., place on file all communications received, and keep a correct record thereof. He shall receive a proper salary.

7. The financial secretary shall keep and make out the lists of sections and members, receive and record all monies and hand them over to the treasurer, taking his vouchers therefor.

8. The treasurer shall receive all monies from the financial secretary, pay bills and honor all orders of the E.C. after they are countersigned by the corresponding secretary and one more member of the E.C., make a correct report on the state of the treasury to the E.C. in every meeting and to the whole organization every three months, and give security to an amount fixed by the E.C.

9. The reports of the treasurer must be examined in a regular meeting of the E.C. and endorsed by the same.

## III. THE BOARD OF SUPERVISION

1. The B.S. (Board of Supervision) shall consist of five members to hold office and to be elected in the same way as the E.C. (See II. 2. and II. 1. a.)

## 2. The duties of the B.S. shall be:

a. To watch over the action of the E.C. and that of the whole party, to superintend the administration and the editorial management of the organs of the party, and to interfere in case of need.

b. To adjust all differences occurring in the party within four weeks after receiving the necessary evidence, subject to the final decision of Congress. (See I. 3.)

c. To make a detailed report on its actions to the Congress.

3. In case of urgency the B.S. may suspend officers and editors till the meeting of the next Congress, such suspension to be submitted at once to a general vote, the result of which shall be made known within four weeks thereafter. (See also II. 4. a. and II. 3.)

4. The B.S. is entitled to send one delegate to the Congress under the same conditions as the E.C. (See II. 4. d.)

(See also V. 2., VI. 4., and press regulations 3, 7, 16, and 17.)

## IV. SECTIONS

1. Ten (10) persons speaking the same language and being wages-laborers shall be entitled to form a Section, provided they acknowledge the principles, statutes, and Congress resolutions, and belong to no political party of the propertied classes. They shall demand admission from the E.C. by transmitting the dues for the current month, and their list of members, the latter to contain the names, residences and trade of the members, and to show their condition as wages-laborers.

2. At least three-fourths of the members of a Section must be wages-laborers. (See VII. 12.)

3. There shall be no more than one Section of the same language in one place, which may meet in different parts of the town or city for the purposes of an active propaganda. Business meetings shall be held once a month.

4. Every Section is responsible for the integrity of its members.

5. Every Section is required:

a. To make a monthly report to the E.C. concerning its activity, membership and financial situation.

b. To entertain friendly relations with the Trades Unions and to promote their formation.

c. To hold regular meetings at least once every two weeks.

d. To direct its efforts exclusively to the organization, enlightenment and emancipation of the working classes.



6. No Section shall take part in a political movement without the consent of the E.C.

7. Five Sections of different localities shall be entitled to call for the meeting of an extraordinary Congress, such Congress to be convened if a majority of the Sections decides in its favor.

#### V. DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

1. A monthly due of five (5) cents for each member shall be transmitted to the E.C. to meet the expense of propaganda and administration.

2. In case of need and with the consent of the B.S. the E.C. is empowered to levy an extraordinary tax. (See also I. 4., VII. 10., and VII. 11.)

#### VI. GENERAL REGULATIONS

1. All Officers, Committees, Boards, etc., shall be chosen by a majority vote.

2. No member of the organization shall hold more than one office at the same time.

3. All Officers, Authorities, Committees, Boards, etc. of the Organization may be dismissed or removed at any time by a general vote of their constituencies and such general vote shall be taken within one month from the date of the motion to that effect provided, however, that said motion be supported by not less than one-third of the respective constituents.

4. Expulsion from one Section shall be valid for the whole Organization if approved of by the E.C. and by the B.S.

5. All members of the organization, by the adoption of this constitution, take upon themselves the duty to assist each other morally and materially in case of need.

6. The Congress alone has the right of amending, altering or adding to this constitution, subject to a general vote of all Sections, the result of which shall be communicated to the E.C. within four weeks.

#### VII. LOCAL STATUTES

1. Every Section shall choose from its ranks one organizer, one recording secretary, one corresponding secretary, one financial secretary, one treasurer and two members of an auditing committee.

2. All these officers shall be elected for six months and the E.C. shall take timely measures to make the elections of newly formed sections correspond with the general elections of the whole party.

3. The organizer conducts the local propaganda and is responsible to the Section. The organizers of the various Sections of one locality

shall be in constant communication with each other in order to secure concerted action.

4. The secretary is charged with the minutes and the correspondence.

5. The financial secretary shall keep and make out the list of members, sign the cards of membership, collect the dues, hand them over to the treasurer and correctly enter them.

6. The treasurer shall receive all monies from the financial secretary and hold them subject to the order of the Section.

7. The auditing committee shall superintend all books and the general management of affairs, and audit all bills.

8. All officers shall make monthly reports to the Section.

9. A chairman is elected in every meeting for maintaining the usual parliamentary order.

10. The monthly dues of each member shall be not less than ten (10) cents, five cents of which shall be paid to the E.C. (See V., and I., 4.)

11. Members being in arrears for three consecutive months, shall be suspended until fulfilling their duties, always excepted those who are sick or out of work.

12. Persons not belonging to the wages class can only be admitted in a regular business meeting by a two-thirds vote. (See D. 1. and 2.)

13. The result of every election within the section must be at once communicated to the E.C.

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#### *Regulations concerning the Press of the Party*

1. The *Labor Standard* and the *Arbeiter-Stimme* of New York, and the *Vorbote* of Chicago are recognized as organs and property of the party.

2. The press (i.e., the organs) shall represent the interests of labor, awaken and arouse class-feeling amongst the workingmen, promote their organization as well as the trades union movement and spread economical knowledge among them.

3. The editorial management of every one of the above papers is entrusted to an editor, appointed either by Congress or by the E.C. and B.S. jointly,—said editor to receive an appropriate salary.

4. Whenever needed, assistant-editors will be appointed by the E.C. with the advice and consent of the chief editor.

5. The chief editor is responsible for the contents of the paper and shall be guided in matters of principle by the declaration of principles of the party: in technical and formal matters by the regulations of the E.C. (See Constitution II. 4. c.)



6. Whenever refusing to insert a communication from a member of the organization, the editor shall make it known to the writer thereof directly or by an editorial notice, when appeal may be made to the E.C.

7. The editor shall observe strict neutrality towards all differences arising within the party, till the B.S. and the Congress have given their decision.

8. For every one of the above three papers there shall be elected at their respective place of publication a Council of Administration of five (5) members who jointly with the E.C. shall appoint and remove the business manager and his assistants.

9. The C.A. (Council of Administration) shall be chosen for one year in the first week of August of every year.

10. The C.A. shall establish rules for the business management, superintend the same, investigate all complaints concerning the business management, redress all grievances if found good, pay their weekly salaries to the editors and managers and make a full report of the state of the paper every three months to all sections by a circular.

11. The manager is bound to mail punctually and address correctly the papers; he shall receive all monies, book them and hand them over to the treasurer of the C.A., and he shall keep the office of the paper in good order. His salary will be determined by the Congress or by the E.C.

12. The receipts of all monies from without shall be published in the paper.

13. The treasurer of the C.A. and the manager shall give security to the C.A. to an amount fixed by the E.C.

14. All sums over and above the amount of the security shall be deposited in a bank by the C.A.

15. The chief-editor's salary shall be between 15 and 20 dollars per week.

16. All complaints against the business management shall in the first place be preferred to the C.A., in the second place to the B.S.

17. All complaints against the editorial management shall in the first place be put before the E.C., in the second place before the B.S.

18. The sections are responsible for the financial liabilities of newspaper-agents nominated by them.

19. The Congress alone can alter, amend or add to these regulations.

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#### THE BALLOT BOX

*Considering*, That the economical emancipation of the working-classes is the great end, to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means;

*Considering*, That the Workingmen's Party of the United States in the first place directs its efforts to the economical struggle;

*Considering*, That only in the economical arena the combatants for the Workingmen's Party can be trained and disciplined;

*Considering*, That in this country the ballot box has long ago ceased to record the popular will, and only serves to falsify the same in the hands of professional politicians;

*Considering*, That the organization of the working people is not yet far enough developed to overthrow at once this state of corruption;

*Considering*, That this middle class Republic has produced an enormous amount of small reformers and quacks, the intruding of whom into the Workingmen's Party will only be facilitated by a political movement, and

*Considering*, That the corruption and mis-application of the ballot box as well as the silly reform movement flourish most in the years of presidential elections, at such times greatly endangering the organization of workingmen;

For these reasons the Union Congress meeting at Philadelphia this 22nd day of July 1876, *Resolved*,

The sections of this party as well as all workingmen in general are earnestly invited to abstain from all political movements for the present and to turn their back on the ballot box.

The Workingmen will therewith save themselves bitter disappointments, and their time and efforts will be directed far better towards the organization of the workingmen, which organization is frequently destroyed and always injured by a hasty political movement.

Let us bide our time! It will come!

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#### WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Union Congress of the Workingmen's Party of the United States declares:

The emancipation of Labor is a social problem, a problem concerning the whole human race and embracing both sexes. The emancipation of women will be accomplished with the emancipation of men, and the so-called women's rights question will be solved with the labor question. All evils and wrongs of the present society can be abolished



only when economical freedom is conquered for men as well as for women.

It is the duty therefore of the wives and daughters of the workingmen to organize themselves and take their places within the ranks of struggling labor. To aid and support them in this work is the duty of the men. By uniting their efforts they will succeed in breaking the economical fetters, and a new and free race of men and women will rise recognizing each other as peers.

We acknowledge the perfect equality of rights of both sexes and in the Workingmen's Party of the United States this equality of rights is a principle and is strictly observed.

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#### NO GENERAL VOTE ON THE WORK OF THE UNION CONGRESS

Considering, That by ordering a general vote on the labors of this Congress the Union so much needed and desired would be retarded;

Considering furthermore, That by a general vote these labors might be left unsettled and even a new Congress might be made necessary;

For these reasons the Union Congress assembled at Philadelphia this 22nd day of July 1876, Resolved,

The general vote on the decisions and resolutions of this Congress is dispensed with and they will be in force and valid for all Workingmen's groups here represented on and after the date of their publication.

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#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Philip Van Patten, corresponding Secretary, 103½ N. Wells Street, Chicago, Ill.

#### BOARD OF SUPERVISION

New Haven, Conn.

#### ORGANS OF THE PARTY

*Labor Standard*, published weekly at 154 Eldridge Street, New York, at 60 Cts. per quarter; \$2.00 per year.

In the German language:

The *Arbeiterstimme*, published weekly at 154 Eldridge Street, New York; 65 Cts. per quarter.

The *Vorbote*, published weekly at 124 S. Franklin Street, Chicago, Ill.; 65 Cts. per quarter.

## NOTES

### Preface

1. It has been claimed that the Social Party of New York City, organized in 1868, when the Marxists and Lassalleans combined, was the first Marxist party in the United States. But after a setback in the local election of 1868, the Social Party dissolved. Its program, moreover, reflected more of a Lassalleian than a Marxist outlook. (Hermann Schlüter, *Die Internationale in Amerika: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Chicago, 1918), pp. 84-87.

Paul Le Blanc describes the Workingmen's Party of the United States as the first Marxist-influenced political party in North America. ("Pioneers of American Socialism: The Workingmen's Party of the United States, 1876-1877," Graduate History Research Paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1978.) This is true, but it does not go far enough. The platform of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, with one exception, was the product of the Marxist delegates to the founding convention. Moreover, it was largely the work of Friedrich A. Sorge, the "Father of American Socialism," a man whom both Marx and Engels regarded as their disciple in the United States, and to whom they entrusted the operation of the International Workingmen's Association, the First International, when its General Council was transferred to the United States in 1872.

### Chapter 1: Prologue

1. Engels remarked with characteristic modesty that his role had been to play "second fiddle" to the genius of his friend Marx. Actually it was Engels who had been the first to establish contact with the labor movement. (*Reminiscences of Marx and Engels* [Moscow, n.d.], p. 192.)
2. Kenneth Lapides, "Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Writings on the Labor Movement," introd., unpub. ms. in possession of author, p. 3.
3. Between 1851 and 1861 a total of 487 articles appeared in the New York *Tribune* under Marx's authorship. Of these, 32 are included in Henry M. Christman, ed., *The American Journalism of Marx and Engels: A Selection from the New York Daily Tribune* (New York, 1966). Though appearing over Marx's name, many were actually written by Engels, including eight of those in Christman's volume. See also Morton Borden, "Some Notes on Horace Greeley, Charles Dana and Karl Marx," *Journalism Quarterly*, 34 (1957), 457-85, and William Harlan Hale, "When Karl Marx Worked for Horace Greeley," *American Heritage*, 8 (April, 1957), 20-25.
4. For Weydemeyer's life and activities, see Karl Obermann, *Joseph Weydemeyer: Pioneer of American Socialism* (New York, 1947), and for his role in the U.S. labor movement, see Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, I (New York, 1947), pp. 8-35, 308-09.
5. David Herreshoff, *Origins of American Marxism* (New York, 1973), p. 62.
6. "Statuten des Kommunisten Klub in New York," Labor Collection—Political Parties, Box 25, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.



7. Hermann Schlüter, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Arbeiter Bewegung in Amerika* (Stuttgart, 1907), pp. 161-62; Obermann, pp. 92-93. Several scholars have argued that since the Communist Club emphasized freethinking and put the battle against supernaturalism first among its objectives, only listing later the demand for the abolition of private property, that it was not a Marxist organization. (See, for example, Herreshoff, pp. 68-69.) But the founders of the club were all former members of the Communist League in Europe, and were in close communication with Marx and counted on his support. Weydemeyer, surely a full-fledged Marxist, viewed the club as Marxist. Friedrich Kamm, chairman of the Communist Club, sent Marx a copy of the club's constitution on Dec. 10, 1858, and there is nothing to indicate that Marx did not regard the club as Marxist. (See Obermann, pp. 91-93.)
8. Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, Conn., 1977), pp. 5-16, 25-26.
9. Hermann Schlüter, *Lincoln, Labor and Slavery* (New York, 1913), pp. 83-84; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 307.
10. Dr. Adolph Douai (1819-1888) was a German-American abolitionist, educator, and socialist. He had been active in the 1848 revolution in Germany, taught in Russia, and then emigrated to Texas, where he established an antislavery newspaper, the *San Antonio Zeitung*. Driven out because of his antislavery views, he came to Boston and New York, helped to launch the kindergarten movement in the U.S., and edited the *Arbeiter-Union* until 1870.
11. Friedrich Adolph Sorge (1827-1906), German-American socialist, music teacher by profession, who fought in the Baden uprising of 1849, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1852, joined the New York Communist Club in 1858, and actively corresponded with Marx and Engels after he became a Marxist.
12. Philip S. Foner, "Marx's *Capital* in the United States," *Science & Society*, 31 (Fall, 1967), 461-66.
13. Philip S. Foner, "Friedrich Adolph Sorge: 'Father of Modern Socialism in America,'" in *Friedrich A. Sorge's Labor Movement in the United States: A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Brewster Chamberlin (Westport, Conn., 1977), p. 8.
14. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (1903; rpt. New York, 1971), p. 178.
15. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, I (New York, 1925), p. 87. In a letter to Engels, Gompers described himself as "a student of your writings and those of Marx and others in the same line." (Philip S. Foner, "Samuel Gompers to Frederick Engels: A letter," *Labor History*, 11 (Spring, 1970), 207-11.)
16. Under Douai's editorship, the *Arbeiter-Union* published excerpts from *Das Kapital* and chapters from Kellogg's *New Monetary System* in the same issue. For Marx's dismissal of Edward Kellogg's currency reform ideas, see Foner, "Sorge," p. 11.
17. *Karl Marx, A Biography* (Dresden, 1968), p. 296.
18. *Minutes of the General Council: 1864-1866*, p. 341.
19. Saul K. Padover, ed., *Karl Marx: On the First International* (New York, 1973), p. xiv.

20. David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1973), p. 360.
21. Lapides, p. 24.
22. *Minutes of the General Council: 1864-1866*, pp. 277-87.
23. Foner, "Sorge," pp. 8-9; *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Letters to Americans, 1848-1895* (New York, 1953), p. 75.
24. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 338-71; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York, 1967), pp. 276-94.
25. James C. Sylvis, *The Life, Speeches, Labors and Essays of William H. Sylvis* (Philadelphia, 1872), pp. 186-87.
26. *Workingman's Advocate*, Aug. 24, 1867.
27. Actually, several unions in England and the United States found it necessary to invoke the assistance of the First International. Marx gave this example: "The Resistance Society of the English Foundrymen is itself an international trade union with branches in other countries, notably in the United States. Nonetheless, during a strike of American foundrymen the latter found it necessary to invoke the intercession of the [International's] General Council to prevent English foundrymen being brought to America." (Padover, p. 214.)
28. John R. Commons, ed., *A Documentary History of the American Industrial Society* (Cleveland, 1910), IX, 338-39. For the background and other aspects of this event, see Philip S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York, 1981), pp. 108-10.
29. Quoted in Samuel Bernstein, *The First International in America* (New York, 1965), p. 33.
30. *Workingman's Advocate*, Aug. 27, 1870.
31. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 372-74, 422-23; Montgomery, pp. 425-48.
32. Johann Philipp Becker to Friedrich A. Sorge, Geneva, May 30, 1867, Friedrich A. Sorge Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts Division.
33. Foner and Chamberlin, *Sorge*, p. 161.
34. Gompers, p. 68.
35. Bernstein, p. 298.
36. Montgomery, p. 251.
37. Foner and Chamberlin, *Sorge*, p. 155.
38. Schlüter, pp. 115-52; Bernstein, pp. 35-49; *New York World*, Nov. 20, 1870; *Workingman's Advocate*, Dec. 3, 1870; Sorge to General Council, IWA, August 20, 1871, International Workingmen's Association Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
39. Schlüter, pp. 132-33; Stuart Bruce Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the American Federation of Labor, 1848-1896* (Westport, Conn., 1973), pp. 26-27.
40. Sorge to General Council, IWA, May 21, 1871, IWA Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Bernstein, pp. 5-56.
41. Sorge to General Council, IWA, Aug. 20, 1871, IWA Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.  
There is as yet no adequate biography of Victoria Woodhull. Of the existing, the best is Emmanie Sachs, *The Terrible Siren: Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927)* (New York, 1928). A good, brief biography is to be found in Madeline B. Stern, *We the Women: Career Firsts of Nineteenth Century Women* (New York, 1963).



42. Foner and Chamberlin, *Sorge*, pp. 17-19.
43. Schlüter, pp. 157-80; Bernstein, pp. 131-60; Hans Gerth, ed., *The First International: Minutes of the Hague Congress of 1872 with Related Documents* (Madison, Wis., 1958), pp. 195-201.
44. G.M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (London, 1928), pp. 222-40.
45. Franz Mehring, "F.A. Sorge, October, 1906," rpt. from *Die Neue Zeit*, 1906/07, I, 145-47, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV (Berlin, 1963), 489.
46. Foner and Chamberlin, *Sorge*, p. 21.
47. Bernstein, pp. 177-87.
48. Sorge to August Senellier, Aug. 8, 1873, original in IWA Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and rpt. in Samuel Bernstein, ed., *Documents of the General Council of the I.W.A., New York: 1872-1876* (Milan, Italy, 1968), p. 103.
49. Marx to Bolte, Nov. 23, 1871, *Marx and Engels, Letters to Americans*, pp. 93-94.
50. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 448-50.  
Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), German lawyer, labor leader, and founder of General German Workers Union (1863), laid down two main demands: political action and state credits for producers' cooperatives. Lassalle's historical service, wrote Marx, was that he "reawakened the workers' movement in Germany after its fifteen years of slumber," but he noted that Lassalle was forced into serious concessions to Prussian reaction, and weakened the trade-union organization of the working class with his theory of the "iron law of wages," and his denigration of trade unions. It was disclosed that Lassalle was on the secret payroll of Count von Bismarck. For a detailed characterization of Lassalle by Marx, see his letter to Kugelmann, Feb. 23, 1865, in *Selected Correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1846-1895* (New York, 1942), pp. 193-97; also pp. 82-83, 146-52, 250-51, 332-39.
51. See *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Letters to Americans*, pp. 68-70, 122-26, 134-35; Karl Marx, "The Trades Unions, Their Future," in *Minutes of the General Council, 1864-1866*, p. 349.
52. Gompers, pp. 381-82; Kaufman, pp. 38-42.
53. "Copie d'un rapport de M. de la Forest, Consul Général de France en New York, à M. le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, en date due 11 Décembre 1873," Archives de la préfecture de police, Paris, BA 435, N916-17. I wish to thank Professor Marianne Debouzy of the University of Paris for furnishing me with a copy of this document.
54. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 317, 366, 445-48; Bernstein, pp. 223-34; Helmut, pp. 177-87; Hereshoff, pp. 136-52; Herbert G. Gutman, "The Tompkins Square 'Riot' in New York City of January 13, 1874: a Re-examination of Its Causes and Its Aftermath," *Labor History*, 6 (Winter, 1965), 44-70.
55. Kenneth Lyle Kann, "Working Class Culture and the Labor Movement in Nineteenth Century Chicago," Diss. Univ. of California-Berkeley 1977, p. 232.
56. Samuel Bernstein, "American Labor in the Long Depression, 1873-1878," *Science & Society*, 20 (Winter, 1956), 59-83; *National Labor Tribune*, Oct. 7, Nov. 25, 1876; Aug. 25, 1877; *Vorbote* (Chicago), June 5, 1874; Gompers, p. 131.

57. John R. Commons et al., *History of Labor in the United States* (New York, 1918), II, 168-69. For an interesting discussion of Thomas A. Armstrong, editor of the *National Labor Tribune*, who also voiced opposition to hasty working-class political action, see John D. French, "'Reaping the Whirlwind': The Origins of the Allegheny Country Greenback Labor Party in 1877," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64 (April, 1981), 97-119.
58. *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (New York), May 6, 1874; Sorge to A.R. Westrup, June 17, 1874, Bernstein, pp. 146-47.
59. Commons, *Documentary History*, IX, 376-78.
60. *Vorbote* (Chicago), June 20, 27, 1874.
61. *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 9, 30, Apr. 1, 1874; Kann, p. 234.

## Chapter 2: Formation of the Workingmen's Party of the United States

1. *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 21, Oct. 26, 27, Nov. 7, 1874; Kann, p. 237.
2. *Workingman's Advocate*, May 2, 1874; Kann, pp. 242-43.
3. *Vorbote*, Dec. 12, 19, 1874.
4. Commons, et al., II, 233; *The Socialist*, May 13, 1876.
5. *Chicago Tribune*, May 7-11, June 4-25, 1875; *Workingman's Advocate*, May 13, 1876; Kann, pp. 243-47.
6. "General Rules of the United Workers of America, 1874," Commons, XI, 376-78; Kaufman, pp. 52-53. J.P. McDonnell (1840-1906), born in Ireland and often arrested and imprisoned for his activities in the Fenian movement, was converted to Marxism in 1869 and was an Irish delegate to the Hague Congress of the IWA in 1872. After the Congress, he emigrated and settled in New York City and became active in the United Workers of America. He was important both as a labor editor and organizer of trade unions, especially in New Jersey, where he lived until his death. He organized the New Jersey Federation of Trades and Labor Unions in 1883 and was its chairman for fifteen years. Friedrich Bolte was a German-American socialist, member of the German Section (No. 1) of the First International in New York, and secretary of the Federal Council. He was a member of the executive board of the General Council after the International's headquarters were moved to the U.S.
7. Bernstein, p. 274.
8. The English text of the Declaration appeared in *The Socialist* (New York), May 6, 1876, and the German text was published in *Sozial-Demokrat* (New York), April 30, 1876, and *Vorbote* (Chicago), April 29, 1876. Emphasis is in the original.
9. J. Winnen, *Vorbote* (Chicago), July 8, 1876.
10. G. Lukert, *ibid.*
11. *The Socialist* (New York), May 6, 1876; *Vorbote* (Chicago), June 17, 24, July 8, 1876.
12. *Vorbote*, July 15, 1876.
13. *The Socialist* (New York), July 15, 1876. See also Philip S. Foner, ed., *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists and Blacks, 1829-1975* (Urbana, 1976), pp. 99-104.
14. *The Socialist* (New York), July 15, 22, 29, 1876.
15. "Rapport du 28 mai 1876, Situation de l'Internationale en Amérique et spécialement aux Etats Unis (New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, etc.),"



- Archives de la préfecture de police, Paris, BA 435, N916-917. The French government's relief was all the greater since in an earlier report it had been given the alarming news that "at the present time, the International has in the Americas about 1,400,000 members," of whom the Germans comprised "about 115,000 members," and that "the American International is very rich." (This memorandum, dated Apr. 24, 1876, is in the same archives of the Paris police.) For a discussion of the French Trade Union Delegation, see Philip S. Foner, "The French Trade Union Delegation to the Centennial of 1876," *Science & Society*, 40 (Spring, 1976), 3-26.
16. International Arbeiter Association, *Verhandlungen der Delegierten-Konferenz zu Philadelphia, 16 Juli 1876* (New York, 1876), pamphlet.
  17. The English translation of the final declaration is from Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*; for another translation, see Bernstein, p. 282.
  18. Otto Weydemeyer, son of Joseph Weydemeyer, pioneer American Marxist, was active in the movement in St. Louis but then moved to Pittsburgh where he agitated among workers in heavy industry. He translated "Extracts from the 'Capital' of Karl Marx," first published in the *Labor Standard* between Dec. 30, 1877, and Mar. 10, 1878, and later issued as a pamphlet, which offered Americans a useful introduction to the basic ideas set forth in Volume I of *Capital*.
  19. Conrad Conzett, a Chicago trade unionist, opposed Lassalleian emphasis on political action and sought to achieve the organization of workers on an economic basis. In April, 1874, the Lassalleian editor of *Vorbote*, Karl Klinge, was retired, and Conzett, a member of the International, was elected in his place. Conzett, a printer by trade, had migrated from Germany to the U.S. in 1859.
  20. Adolph Strasser (1851-1910) was born in Austria-Hungary and emigrated to the U.S. around 1871. He became a cigarmaker and helped organize New York cigarmakers excluded from membership in the Cigarmakers' International Union of America. With Samuel Gompers he played a leading role in the United Cigarmakers and was elected international president of the Cigarmakers' International Union of America in 1877, serving until 1891. Strasser helped organize the Social-Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America, and founded the American Federation of Labor in 1881.
  21. Peter J. McGuire (1852-1906), born in New York City, became an apprentice wood joiner and joined the International Workingmen's Association. Influenced by German-American socialists, he joined the Lassalleian movement. After he broke from Lassalleianism he organized the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and supported the principles of pure-and-simple trade unionism. He drafted the call for the convention that set up the American Federation of Labor, in which he was an active figure. He is known as the father of Labor Day, but this is contested by those who favor Matthew MacGuire, a member of the Socialist Labor Party and a New Jersey trade unionist.
  22. The membership figures and discussion of the unity congress are based on the manuscript copy of the official "Proceedings of the Union Congress, Held at Philadelphia, July 19-22, 1876," Labor Collection, 13A, Box 2, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. A summary of the proceedings appeared in *The Socialist* (New York), July 29, Aug. 5, 1876.
  23. Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Formation of the Workingmen's Party of the United States: Proceedings of the Union Congress Held at Philadelphia,*

July 19-22, 1876, (American Institute for Marxist Studies, Occasional Paper No. 18), New York, 1976.

24. *Ibid.*
25. For protests over the suspension of the ratification procedure, see *Labor Standard*, Aug. 12, 1876. The *Labor Standard* in an editorial criticized the protestors for seeking to disrupt the new party: "This long desired and much needed Union has been achieved and no man but an enemy will raise voice or pen against it."
26. *The Socialist* (New York), Aug. 12, 1876.

### Chapter 3: Organization, Education, and Growth

1. *Labor Standard*, Aug. 12, 19, 1876.
2. *Labor Standard*, Aug. 29, Sept. 16, 1876.
3. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, 1876, and thereafter.
4. Rpt. in Foner and Chamberlin, *Sorge, Labor Movement in the United States*, pp. 299-310.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Adolph Douai, *Better Times* (New York, 1877).
7. See *Investigation by a Select Committee of the House of Representatives Relative to the Causes of the General Depression in Labor & Business, Etc.*, 45th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1879, pp. 29-41.
8. *Labor Standard*, Feb. 17, 1877.
9. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, 1876.
10. W. Elliot Brownlee and Mary M. Brownlee, *Women in the American Economy: A Documentary History, 1675-1929* (New Haven, 1976), p. 3; Montgomery, p. 33.
11. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, 1876.
12. Douai, p. 26.
13. Paul Le Blanc, "Pioneers of American Socialism: The Workingmen's Party of the United States, 1876-1877," Graduate Research Paper, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1978, p. 52.
14. Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (New York, 1929), pp. 182-83; Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons, American Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1976), pp. 33-34. See also Lizzie Swank Holmes, "Women Workers of Chicago," *American Federationist*, 12 (Aug., 1905), 508-09.
15. Hillquit, p. 225.
16. Le Blanc, p. 17.
17. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 20, 1877.
18. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 27, 1877.
19. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 23, 1876; Le Blanc, p. 18.
20. *Labor Standard*, Feb. 3, 1877; rpt. in full in Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, 1975), pp. 128-29.
21. Foner, "Sorge," p. 13.  
In 1867, the NLU adopted one of the most advanced appeals to white workingmen for Black-white unity in American history. Written by Andrew C. Cameron, it went in part: "Negroes are four million strong and a greater proportion of them labor with their hands than can be counted among the



same number of any other people on earth. Can we afford to reject their proffered co-operation and make them enemies? By committing such an act of folly we would inflict greater injury upon the cause of labor reform than the combined efforts of capital could accomplish. . . . Capitalists North and South would foment discord between the whites and blacks and hurl one against the other as interest and occasion might require to maintain their ascendancy and continue the reign of oppression. . . . What is wanted is for every union to help inculcate the grand ennobling idea that the interests of labor are one; that there should be no distinction of race or nationality; no classification of Jew or Gentile, Christian and infidel; that there is one dividing line, that which separates mankind into two great classes, the class that labors and the class that lives by others' labor." (*The Address of the National Labor Congress to the Workingmen of the United States* [Chicago, 1867].) For efforts made by the NLU to implement this resolution, and the ultimate defeat of such efforts by racism in the labor movement, see Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* (New York, 1982), pp. 20-46.

22. Foner, "Sorge," p. 13.
23. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans* p. 44.  
Neither G.M. Stekloff in *History of the First International* (London, 1921) nor Hermann Schluter, in *Die Internationale in Amerika*, mention the Negro. Samuel Bernstein's *The First International in America* has two references. For the First International in the United States and Blacks, see Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, pp. 37-42, 307-09.
24. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 395; Harold M. Baron, *The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 12-13.
25. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York, 1935), pp. 359-65; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York, 1965), pp. 172-73; C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction, The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston, 1951).
26. The reference is to the struggles of the Nez Perce and Sioux people. "Sitting Bullism" refers to the Indian victory on the Little Big Horn, where General George Armstrong Custer and his men were defeated and killed on June 25, 1876. Sitting Bull, who led the Sioux in the victory, and some of his followers escaped to Canada. (See Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* [New York, 1972], pp. 9-13, 299-302.) See also Le Blanc, pp. 19-20.
27. *Workingman's Advocate*, Aug. 27, 1870; *New National Era and Citizen*, Dec. 18, 1873. For Clark's career as a pioneer Black educator, see L.S. Easton, "The Colored Schools of Cincinnati," in Isaac M. Martin, ed., *History of the Schools of Cincinnati and Other Educational Institutions, Public and Private* (Cincinnati, 1900), pp. 181-88; Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, pp. 45-57; Herbert G. Gutman, "Peter H. Clark: Pioneer Negro Socialist, 1877," *Journal of Negro Education*, 20 (Fall, 1965), 400-17.
28. The Sovereigns of Industry was founded in January, 1874, by Edward Martin Chamberlin (1835-1892), member of an English-speaking section of the First International in Boston, as a means of abolishing the wage system. Chamberlin outlined his system in his book, *The Sovereigns of Industry* (Boston, 1875). The Sovereigns mainly operated cooperative stores. The total membership in 1875-76 was said to be 40,000, of whom 75 percent were in New England. The organization was dead by 1878.

29. Gutman, p. 414.
30. *Cincinnati Commercial*, Nov. 27, 1875.
31. *Cincinnati Commercial*, June 17 and 26, 1876.
32. *Cincinnati Commercial*, Dec. 11, 1876.
33. *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 27, 1877.
34. *The Emancipator* (Cincinnati), March 31, 1872.

#### Chapter 4: The Great Debate

1. Foner and Chamberlin, p. 200.
2. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, 1876.
3. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 9, 16, 23, 30, 1876.
4. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 9, 30, Oct. 21, 1876.
5. McGuire has been described by one labor historian as "a good and devout Lassalleian," a man who was basically opposed to trade unionism in this period. (Robert A. Christie, *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters Union*. [Ithaca, N.Y., 1956], pp. 102-03.) On the other hand, David Nicholas Lyon contends that "there is no indication that McGuire had deserted trade unionism for politics, although it is certain that he saw political action as a reasonable tactic for the socialists in New Haven in 1876." ("The World of P.J. McGuire: A Study of the American Labor Movement, 1870-1890," Diss. Univ. of Minnesota, 1972, p. 68). However, in the rest of Lyon's study of this period McGuire clearly emerges as opposed to trade unionism and as favoring almost complete reliance by the working class on political action.
6. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, Oct. 21, 1876.
7. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, 23, 1876.
8. *Labor Standard*, Oct. 21, 1876.
9. *Labor Standard*, Oct. 28, 1876; *Cigarmakers' Official Journal*, Nov. 1876; Kaufman, p. 71.
10. *Labor Standard*, Oct. 28, 1876.  
In the *Sozial-Demokrat* of July 9, 1876, Strasser had written: "I will admonish the Congress on the Unity of Workers taking place in Philadelphia: The main tasks of the American Socialists in the near future consists in the strong and energetic promotion of the organization and centralization of the trade unions." (Rpt. in H.M. Gitelman, "Adolph Strasser and the Origins of Pure and Simple Trade Unionism," *Labor History*, 6 (Winter, 1965), 76.
11. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 11, 1876.
12. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 18, 1876.
13. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 25, 1876.
14. For a discussion of the Greenback Party, see Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879* (Princeton, N.J., 1969); Robert Sharkey, *Money, Class, and Party: An Economic Study of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 1959), and Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 476-78.
15. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 25, 1876.
16. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 18, 25, 1876.
17. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 25, 1876.
18. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 27, 1877.
19. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 13, 1877.
20. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, Nov. 18, 1876; Jan. 6, 13, 27, Apr. 7, 14, 21, 1877.



David Kronberg's three articles, "Labor—Real and Idea," appeared in the issues of Apr. 7, 14, 21, 1877. For a summary, see Kaufman, pp. 74-76.

21. In two graduate seminar papers at the University of Pittsburgh, Department of History—"Beyond the Myth of 'Marxists vs. Lassalleans' in America," and "Pioneer Socialists in America: The Workingmen's Party of the United States, 1876-1877," Paul Le Blanc argues that the whole concept of a conflict between Marxists and Lassalleans in the Workingmen's Party of the United States is a "myth," and he would rather that historians speak of "pro-electoral and anti-electoral" factions. But it turns out, as his discussion proceeds, that he has simply covered up the actuality by giving it another name. Le Blanc, for example, uses McGuire's letters to the *Labor Standard* in which he reported on strikes and trade union activity in New Haven as proof that he was not a Lassallean and did not espouse Lassalleian doctrines. But he ignores his letters in which political action is the main weapon of the working class and only lip-service is given to the ideas of organizing workers into trade unions. The fact that McGuire later changed, and became a leading pure-and-simple trade union leader in the American Federation of Labor does not obscure the fact that he was a Lassalleian at the time of the WPUS.

This is not to say that all of the elements in the Lassalleian faction were anti-trade union, but it is clear that they submerged whatever interest they had in trade unionism in their enthusiasm for immediate political activity. What Le Blanc overlooks is that the debate between the two groups took place in a particular period in U.S. labor history when, to use McDonnell's expression, the "Necessities of the Hour" did call for concentration of all energies to the task of rebuilding the trade unions shattered by the "Great Depression," and to establishing new unions. Le Blanc quotes a statement by Marx in 1850 to support electoral action, and implies that under no circumstances, therefore, should Marxists have abstained from electoral activity. But the period of the great debate was precisely a period which required such temporary abstention.

Le Blanc insists that what the two factions disagreed over was really the question of what were the chances of getting elected. He thus minimizes the significance of one of the most important issues confronting the American workers of the period.

Two recent articles in scholarly journals which show that a basic conflict between Lassalleian and Marxist socialists did exist, are John D. French, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The Origins of the Allegheny County Greenback-Labor Party in 1877," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64 (Apr. 1981), 106-21, and Kenneth Fones-Wolf, "Boston Eight Hour Men, New York Marxists and the Emergence of the International Labor Union: Prelude to the AFL," *Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts*, 9 (June, 1981), 47-57.

22. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, Dec. 30, 1876.
23. *The Emancipator*, Mar. 31, 1877.

Among the points stressed in the City Platform were opposition to "farming out of prison labor to private contractors"; the demand for "the immediate purchase of the Gas Works"; organization of a Sanitary Commission "whose duty it shall be to oversee the tenement houses of the city, and as far as the laws of the State will permit, prevent unjust 'ousters' from being executed and extortionate rents from being collected for tumble-down tenement houses"; municipal ownership and operation of the street railroad companies, and creation by the city of "employment for the unemployed laborers of the city, by a system of public improvements."

24. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 6, 13, June 16, 1877.
25. *Labor Standard*, Jan. 20, 27, Feb. 24, Apr. 14, 1877; Foner, *History of Labor Movement*, I, 453.
26. *Arbeiterstimme* (New York), June 17, 1877.
27. *Labor Standard*, July 14, 1877.

Albert Parsons (1848-1887) was a self-taught intellectual and worker who came from a notable New England family. After settling in the South, he became a Confederate soldier during the Civil War, but after the war, actively supported Negro rights and Radical Reconstruction in Texas. His wife Lucy, a woman of Indian, Spanish, and Black ancestry, was also active in this cause. In 1873, when the Radical regime in Texas was overthrown, they fled to Chicago to escape the wrath of the Ku Klux Klan. It was there that Albert, now a printer, became active in the Typographical Union. Albert and Lucy Parsons both became socialists in 1874, and later, when there were convinced that force, not political action, was the route to socialism, they both turned to anarchism.

28. *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1877.  
Karl Klinge was the Lassalleian editor of *Vorbote* when it was founded in 1874. He was replaced by Conrad Conzetti, a member of the International, but continued as a force for Lassalleianism in the Chicago socialist movement.
29. *Chicago Times*, July 5, 1877.
30. Kann, pp. 248-49.
31. David Montgomery, "Labor and the Republic in Industrial America: 1860-1920," *Mouvement Social*, (France) 111 (1980), 207.

### Chapter 5: The W.P.U.S. and the Great Labor Uprising of 1877

1. For detailed accounts of the railroad strikes of 1877, see: J.A. Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strikes* (Chicago, 1877) and Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (Indianapolis, 1959). For a detailed account of the strike in one city, see David T. Burbank, *Reign of the Rabble: The St. Louis General Strike of 1877* (New York, 1966). For general accounts of the strikes, see Commons et al., *History of Labor in the United States*, II, 185-91; Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York, 1977) and *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, I, 464-74; Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles* (New York, 1936), pp. 3-38; Jeremy Brecher, *Strike* (San Francisco, 1972), pp. 1-24; Philip A. Slaner, "The Railroad Strikes of 1877," *Marxist Quarterly*, 1 (Apr.-June, 1937), 214-36; Gerald N. Grob, "The Railroad Strikes of 1877," *Midwest Journal*, 6 (Winter, 1954-55), 16-34. For railroad strikes before the 1877 uprising, see Herbert G. Gutman, "Troubles on the Railroads in 1873-1874; Prelude to the 1877 Crisis," *Labor History*, 2 (Spring, 1961), 202-28.
2. V. Poor, *Poor's Manual for Railroads, for 1877, 1878-1879; Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, July 14, 1877, p. 30; Aug. 11, 1877, p. 126; Aug. 18, 1877, p. 149; *Harper's Weekly*, 17 (Nov. 1, 1873), 963; *Railroad Gazette*, 9 (Aug. 10, 1877), p. 365; "Railroad Wages," *Nation*, 25 (Aug. 16, 1877), 99; *Baltimore American*, July 18, 20, 1877.
3. *Baltimore American*, July 18-20, 1877; *Baltimore Sun*, July 18-21, 1877; *Wheeling* (West Virginia) *Intelligencer*, July 17-21, 1877; *Martinsburg Statesman*, July 17, 24, 1877; *Biennial Message of Governor M. Mathews with accompanying documents to the Legislature of West Virginia* (Wheeling,



- 1879), pp. 1-10. For the first use of federal troops to break a strike, see Richard B. Morris, "Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker," *American Historical Review*, 55 (Oct., 1949), 54-68.
4. *Missouri Republican*, July 24, 1877; *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1877; *Baltimore Sun*, July 20, 1877; Yellen, p. 12.
  5. *Report of the Committee to Investigate the Railroad Riots in July, 1877* (Harrisburg, 1878); Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, pp. 55-78; James A. Henderson, "The Railroad Riots in Pittsburgh . . .," *Western Penn. Historical Magazine*, 40 (July, 1928), 193-97; Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor* (Columbus, Ohio, 1889), 201.
  6. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, pp. 103-05.
  7. Allan Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* (New York, 1878), pp. 79, 88; Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, pp. 103-05.
  8. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 28, 1877; Dacus, p. 76.
  9. Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *A History of the United States Since the Civil War* (New York, 1926), IV, 122-23.
  10. Bruce, pp. 228-30.
  11. *The Socialist* (New York), Aug. 26, 1876.
  12. Burbank, p. 74.
  13. *Chicago Tribune*, July 23, 1877; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 23, 1877.
  14. *Labor Standard*, July 28, Aug. 4, 1877.
  15. Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism* (Columbia, S.C., 1953), pp. 3, 13-14.
  16. *Labor Standard*, June 3, 10, 1877.
  17. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 114-15; Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising*, p. 117; Bruce, pp. 267-70; *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 27-29, 1877; Ira B. Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1955), pp. 89-90.
- Twenty-five percent of the labor force in California was Chinese. Most of them had been brought to the United States through a system of contract labor developed through the combined efforts of Chinese and U.S. business interests. "All accounts," writes Alexander Saxton, "seem to agree that the Chinese came to California in organized groups: that they were received by the Six Companies in San Francisco and housed, fed, and sent off to their various places of employment. At the bottom of this organizational structure were the laborers. Above them was an assortment of gang foremen, agents and interpreters. At the top were the Chinese merchants of San Francisco who, as directors of the Six Companies, represented or were associated with even wealthier merchants and businessmen in China. The resident merchants in San Francisco dealt, more or less on a basis of equality, with American business interests desirous of securing contract labor" (Saxton, pp. 7-8, 11.) This provided a source of cheap labor—denounced as "Coolie labor"—to be contracted out to railroads, mines, factories, agricultural enterprises, and a variety of semi-skilled and unskilled occupations.
18. *Labor Standard*, July 28, 1877.
  19. Saxton, pp. 113-56.
  20. *Boston Globe*, July 24-25, 1877; *Labor Standard*, Aug. 4, 1877; *Philadelphia North American*, July 24, 26, 27, 1877; *New York Times*, July 25, 29, 30, 1877; Bruce, p. 232.
  21. *New York World*, July 26, 1877; *New York Sun*, July 26, 1877; *New York Times*, July 26, 1877; Bruce, p. 277. For John Swinton's role in the

- Tompkins Square clash between police and the unemployed, January 13, 1874, see Marc Ross, "John Swinton, Journalist and Reformer, The Active Years, 1857-1887," Diss. New York Univ. 1969, pp. 83-90, and Herbert G. Gutman, "The Tompkins Square 'Riot' in New York City on January 31, 1874," *Labor History*, 6 (Winter, 1965), 63-64.
22. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 25, 26, 28, 29, 1877; Pinkerton, p. 381; Bill I. Weaver, "Louisville's Labor Disturbance, July, 1877," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, 48 (Apr., 1974), 179-85.
  23. *Cincinnati Commercial*, July 23, 1877; *The Emancipator* (Cincinnati), July 28, 1877. The speech by Clark is reprinted in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Voice of Black America: Major Speeches by Blacks in the United States, 1797-1973* (New York, 1975), I, 481-87. Extracts may be found in Herbert G. Gutman, "Peter H. Clark: Pioneer Negro Socialist, 1877," *Journal of Negro Education*, 34 (Fall, 1969), 413-18.
  24. Peter H. Clark, principal of the Colored High School in Cincinnati, was probably the first American Negro socialist. He was a Republican until 1877, when, disillusioned with the Republican Party's indifference to the problems of Negroes in the South and concerned over the growing power of industrial capitalists, he became a member of the English-speaking section of the Workingmen's Party.
  25. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 27, Aug. 1, 1877.
  26. *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1877; *Chicago Times*, July 24, 1877; *Chicago Daily News*, July 24, 1877; Bruce, pp. 236-37.
  27. The full text of Parsons' speech was published in *Labor Standard*, Aug. 11, 1877.
  28. *Chicago Times*, July 25, 1877; *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1877; *Chicago Daily News*, July 25, 1877; *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, July 25, 1877; *Baltimore Sun*, July 25, 1877.
  29. *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 1877.
  30. Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (New York, 1969), pp. 31-33; *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1877; Alan Calmer, *Labor Agitator: The Story of Albert R. Parsons* (New York, 1937), p. 28.
  31. *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1877.
  32. *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, July 26, 1877.
  33. *Chicago Daily News*, July 27, 31, 1877; *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, July 27, 28, 29, 1877; *Chicago Tribune*, July 27, 28, 29, 1877.
  34. *St. Louis Missouri-Republican*, July 25, 1877; *New York Sun*, July 26, 1877.
  35. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 22, 1877; *St. Louis Times*, July 23, 1877; *St. Louis Missouri-Republican*, July 23, 1877; Burbank, pp. 15-16.
  36. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 24, 1877; *St. Louis Times*, July 24, 1877; *St. Louis Missouri-Republican*, July 25, 1877; Burbank, p. 35.
  37. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 25, 1877; *St. Louis Times*, July 25, 1877; *St. Louis Missouri-Republican*, July 25, 1877.
  38. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 26, 1877. A copy of the original leaflet of the Proclamation in English and German is in the files of the International Workingmen's Association, State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. It is reproduced as a frontispiece in David T. Burbank, *Reign of the Rabble: The St. Louis General Strike of 1877*.
  39. *St. Louis Missouri-Republican*, July 26, 1877.
  40. *Scranton Republican*, July 26, 1877.



41. St. Louis *Missouri-Republican*, July 26, 1877; St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 26, 1877; Bruce, pp. 274-76; Burbank, pp. 73-75.
  42. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*, pp. 229-30.
  43. Burbank, pp. 69-70, 78, 112, 177-78; Amy Schechter, "Labor Struggles in 1877," *Daily Worker*, July 17, 1926; David R. Roediger, "America's First General Strike: The St. Louis 'Commune' of 1877," *Midwest Quarterly*, 21 (1980), 196-206.
  44. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 26, 1877.
  45. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 27, 1877.
  46. New York *Sun*, rpt. in Burbank, p. 73.
  47. St. Louis *Missouri-Republican*, July 26, 1877.
  48. St. Louis *Missouri-Republican*, July 27, 28, 29, 1877; St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 25, 26, 27, 1877; Russell M. Nolen, "The Labor Movement in St. Louis from 1860 to 1890," *Missouri Historical Review*, 24 (Jan. 1940), 170-72.
  49. St. Louis *Times*, Aug. 4, 1877.
  50. Burbank, p. 48.
  51. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 28, 1877.
  52. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 25, 1877; Scranton *Republican*, July 25, 1877.
  53. St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 28, 1877; New York *Times*, July 28, 1877.
  54. Bruce, p. 282; Burbank, pp. 115-16.
  55. St. Louis *Missouri-Republican*, July 28, 29, 30, 1877; St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, July 28, 29, 30, 1877; St. Louis *Times*, July 28, 29, 30, 1877; Burbank, pp. 134-37, 162-69, 186-87.
- In the end the charges against the members of the Executive Committee were dismissed because of lack of evidence. Burbank (p. 187) points out that several historians, myself included, have incorrectly asserted that the members of the Executive Committee were sentenced to five years in the penitentiary and fined \$2000 each. The reference in my case is to *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, I, 473.
56. Charles Richard Williams, *The Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes* (Columbus, 1924), V, 440.
  57. Chicago *Tribune*, July 29, 1877.
  58. "History of the Labor Movement in Chicago," in (Lucy E. Parsons), *Life of Albert Parsons* (Chicago, 1889), p. XVI.
  59. David J. Scharnau, "Thomas J. Morgan, Chicago Socialist," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1968, p. 43-44.
  60. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, pp. 200-01; St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, Aug. 7, 1877; Burbank, p. 50.
  61. "A Red-Hot Striker" of Scranton, Pa., "Do the Railway Kings Look For an Empire, Do They?" *Radical Review*, 1 (Nov. 1877), 527.

### Chapter 6: Triumph of the "Political-Action Socialists"

1. Judson Grenell, "Autobiography," unpublished manuscript (1930), Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, 23, 28-31; Richard Oestreicher, "Socialism and the Knights of Labor in Detroit, 1877-1886," *Labor History*, 22 (Winter, 1981), 7-8.
2. Grenell, "Autobiography," p. 30.
3. Oestreicher, pp. 8-9.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 32; *The Socialist*, June 14, 1879.

5. *The Socialist*, Dec. 8, 1877.
  6. New York *World*, New York *Sun*, New York *Tribune*, July 26, 1877; Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, pp. 119-22.
  7. New York *Herald*, July 27, 1877; *Labor Standard*, Aug. 4, 1877; Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, pp. 122-23.
  8. *Labor Standard*, Aug. 11, 18, 1877.
  9. *Arbeiterstimme*, Aug. 12, 19, 26, 1877.
  10. *Arbeiterstimme*, Aug. 19, 26, 1877.
  11. Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, July 24, 1877, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin), vol. 34, p. 59; Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, p. 230.
  12. John D. French, "'Reaping the Whirlwind': The Origins of the Allegheny County Greenback-Labor Party in 1877," *Western Penn. Historical Magazine*, 64 (April, 1981), 108.
  13. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 479-82.
  14. French, pp. 101-02.
  15. *Labor Standard*, Aug. 11, 1877.
  16. Scranton *Republican*, July 30, Aug. 8, 1877; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 479. These developments did not seem to impress the Marxists. In *Better Times*, Douai (pp. 7-8, 20-23) mentions the farmers (Sorge's pamphlet does not), but he considers that farming "on a large scale with machines, chemicals, draining, subsoiling, improved breeds of domestic animals and rational division of labor will . . . drive the small farmers out of competition, will reduce them to wage laborers, or overseers." As for appealing to the small farmers, Douai feels this would be a mistake: "It would no doubt be an unwise policy to begin the fight against capitalism where its power originated, in the many small real estate owners, who may have escaped the swallowing jaws of capital."
  17. *Labor Standard*, Oct. 2, 1876; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 471-78.
  18. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 18, 1877.
  19. French, p. 109.
  20. *National Labor Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1877.
  21. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 2, 1877.
  22. French, p. 110.
  23. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, 1877.
  24. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 16, 1877; French, pp. 110-11.
  25. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, 1877.
- John D. French, who has checked 139 delegates from Allegheny City and Pittsburgh against city directories, finds that of the seventy for whom some information on occupation is available, "sixty-two were earners of wages or salaries. Of the fifty-six whose occupations could be safely identified, twenty-nine were craft workers, fifteen laborers, and twelve nonworkers. Among the crafts represented were heaters, puddlers, rollers, polishers, mold-makers, glassblowers, blacksmiths, printers, machinists, coopers, cabinet-makers, carpenters, miners, and marble polishers" (French, p. 113.)
26. *National Labor Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1876; French, p. 111n.
  27. *National Labor Tribune*, Sept. 15, 1877.
  28. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 30, 1877.
  29. *Labor Standard*, Oct. 21, 1877.
  30. Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 2-8, 1877; Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, pp. 221-22.
  31. *The Emancipator*, Aug. 4, 11, 1877.



32. *Labor Standard*, Aug. 12, 19, 1877.
33. *The Emancipator*, Aug. 4, 11, 1877.
34. Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, p. 224.
35. *Labor Standard*, Nov. 22, 1877.
36. *Ibid.*, Oct. 7, 28, 1877; Commons et al., I, 277; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 503.
37. Friedrich A. Sorge Collection, Doc. No. 65, "The National Platform and Principles of the Socialist Labor Party," Wisconsin State Historical Society.

### Chapter 7: Epilogue

1. For the history of the International Labor Union, see Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 500-04; Foner and Chamberlin, 31-33, 166-67, 172, 187-88.
2. The principles and ultimate aims were the product of the Steward wing of the coalition and emphasized Steward's theory that the eight-hour day was the road to the abolition of the wage system. Unlike Steward, the Marxists did not believe that the capitalists would voluntarily abandon their ownership of the means of production and turn their factories over to the workers as soon as their profits had been absorbed into the wages of the workers through the operation of the eight-hour day. But the Marxists and the eight-hour leaders did agree on two principal points in the program: the wage system was a despotism, and the "first step towards the emancipation of labor is a reduction in the hours of labor." Sorge and his colleagues were ready to make concessions because they regarded the eight-hour movement led by Steward as "an oasis in the desert of Currency Reform humbug." Further, the Marxists believed that the International Labor Union provided the means by which the majority of American workers, skilled and unskilled, could be organized into trade unions and through their struggles come to see more clearly the need for socialism. (See Foner and Chamberlin, pp. 187-88.)
3. Convict system refers to labor performed by convicts in prisons which competed with workers on the outside and dragged down their wages. The truck system refers to the requirement that workers, especially miners, purchase only in company stores where prices were higher than elsewhere.
4. *Labor Standard*, Sept. 7, Oct. 12, 1878.
5. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 501.
6. Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (New York, 1977), pp. 22-23.
7. *Labor Standard*, Mar. 24, July 21, 1878, Jan. 4, 1879.
8. *Labor Standard*, May 5, 1878.
9. "The object of the International Labor Union," wrote Carl Speyer, general secretary of the union, "is chiefly to organize the unskilled laborers. . . ." (Papers of the International Labor Union, Wisconsin State Historical Society.)
10. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 501.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
12. Foner, "Sorge," p. 37; Gompers, I, 127, 210, 388-89.
13. Foner and Chamberlin, p. 264.

14. For the story of the Knights of Labor before 1881, see Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 433-37, 504-11.
15. *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1881-1886*, pp. 15-16.
16. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 520; II, 132-44.
17. *Pittsburgh Telegraph*, Nov. 17, 1881.
18. *Proceedings*, p. 3; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 520.
19. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, I, 524.
20. Hillquit, pp. 205-07.
21. Commons et al., I, 280-84.
22. Foner, *Great Labor Uprising*, p. 226-27; Hillquit, p. 226.
23. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 37-38.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
26. Philip S. Foner, ed., *When Karl Marx Died: Comments in 1883* (New York, 1973), p. 64.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-106.
31. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 98-99.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 100-01.
33. *John Swinton's Paper*, May 16, 1886.
34. Rpt. in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence by Jose Marti*, trans. Elinor Randall (New York, 1977), p. 63.
35. For the story of the Haymarket Affair, see Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, rev. ed. (New York, 1963); Foner, *Autobiographies of Haymarket Martyrs*, and Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 105-14.
36. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, II, 179-180.
37. Preface to the 4th German edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, dated May 1, 1890, in *The Communist Manifesto of K. Marx and F. Engels* (New York, 1930), p. 208.
38. *New York Tribune*, *New York World*, *New York Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 1890; Sidney Fine, "The Eight-Hour Day Movement in the United States, 1888-1891," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 40 (Dec., 1933), 455-56.
39. See Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States: The Policies and Practices of the A.F. of L., 1900-1909* (New York, 1964), and Bernard Mandel, *Samuel Gompers: A Biography* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1963).
40. Foner and Chamberlin, pp. 295-96.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 297-98.



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